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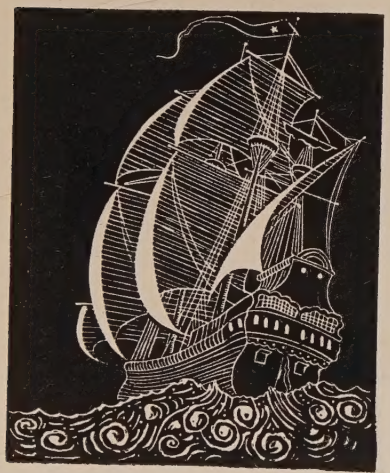

—GLEN STIRLING

PHOEBE MITCHELL

SICILY

ISLAND OF FIRE

Returning from the Fields

SICILY

Island of Fire

By Donald Ordway

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Foreword

IT appears to be a well-established custom to place a foreword at the beginning of a volume of this sort, which will advise the reader that it is *not* a guide-book he is about to peruse. The scorn of the intelligent, the sophisticated traveller for all that Herr Baedeker's many red publications are supposed to symbolize is well known. Let the people who *must* cling to their Baedeker; we have no use for it, we know what we want to see in the world and we very much dislike to be told by stupid stars what we must not miss—we élite. Naturally then, the author says at the beginning, that his is not a guide-book. But there is another advantage in such a declaration; namely (and frankly), it immediately relieves the writer from all possible concern with facts, with accuracies even. Such and such a place is not, as he has written, between this one and that other; the fine fourteenth century carving is not in Santa Maria, but in San Paolo, and the superb statue does not happen to be by the hand of Praxiteles, but a late Roman copy of an anonymous thing. What matter? Is he writing a guide-book? Decidedly he is not. Only Impression; perhaps even Literature! No, he really cannot be bothered with facts and it is a great help to establish this in the reader's mind without delay.

In all truth, Sicily is not factual; it seems to abhor exactness of time and place. If you meet a Sicilian by

appointment, you find each other, it is understood, "along the Corso after luncheon." Perhaps it is today, perhaps next week. Yet here and there in these pages of mine I have had to use a date, unwillingly I will admit, or to say that a certain town is just here, a *castello* there and, to aid a memory that is not all it should be, I have—well, I have turned the leaves of a guide-book which, in some unexplainable fashion, have become well thumbed.

Books about the island of Sicily are many and excellent, from the Greeks who wrote the legends of the Sicilian gods to, shall we say, Herr Baedeker himself. Many of these I have read, many more I have not, but never have I been shy about using what others have discovered and described, and this is the most I can say in acknowledgment, in sincere thanks to the many men and women of the many centuries whose names I have forgotten and whose revealing phrases or sound, detailed pages, purloined, have been first my guides about an unfamiliar land and, now later, have become—I have no doubt—my own best sentences and my own chapters. All books are made to be used with careless violence like this; all travel books are frankly written in the hope that this will be their unique fate. And any book, I think, might have a far less satisfactory end.

Rome,
March 1930.

The Island of Fire

I

SICILY, southern island of volcano, of Etna, of paradox, lies on its warm and azure sea, to charm, to excite, to exasperate; an island as old as the Homeric gods who peopled it, as freshly new as an opening almond blossom. Here is such beauty that one walks softly and is hushed, and here is stark, forbidding severity and barrenness. Over it all stands Etna; over all Sicily lies the paradox of Etna, giver of a hot exhaustless fertility, an extravagant richness of earth, and the wanton destroyer of that earth. Since dim ages she has poured lavishly, carelessly, into the hands of the Sicilian people, her sons—a dark, proud, theatric people—the bounty that by flame and lava and earthquake, repeatedly she has snatched away. The inherent uncertainty, the constant excitement and tension of Sicily is volcanic. One never knows. Tomorrow perhaps—?

Northerners do not live in Sicily. They come eagerly to warm themselves at Etna's fire, but they flee the increasing heat and nervous emotional significance of Etna's island and Etna's people. Something tires them they find. Of a sudden they go away. Is it their fear of eruption and destruction signalled by the floating plume of yellow smoke, of the focused, concentric swirl of Sicilian life, or that half-mad clangor of Sicilian bells, of roosters crowing through dark nights and dogs

that never sleep; of cliffs that drop too far, too suddenly, into a sea too blue? Or is it the sharp violence of children playing and the frenzy of men talking together; the Arabic minor melodies of Sicilian singing, the mountains that are too stripped and tragic, the moist seaward-opening valleys too lush with flowers and fruit? Perhaps they recoil from the wails of vegetable hawkers and animals being beaten, from church festas where men shout and women weep and naked children are held aloft in the burning sun. A hillside field can be too preposterously spread with cyclamen and anemone and asphodel. Here is far too much life, too much of birth and fruition and death; life poured out profusely; life that is too quick to ripen, too rapidly wasting, and like the fruit, too mellow-sweet. Sicily is intense drama on too small a stage. Three hours at such a play—yes, but please, no more.

For Sicily is inherently theatric and her performance is all climax. One is not allowed to stand a spectator, coolly aloof, but is dragged into the middle of it and so becomes an actor oneself. Coming only to observe, merely to see Sicily, one ends by becoming a part of Sicily. Where is the ease and lave and languor of the sunny south, the famed *dolce far niente*, the sweet benison of long siesta one thought to find?

Always distantly drifts the plume of smoke, a living proof of Etna and earth's heart of fire. One should not choose a volcano for an easy pillow, nor expect to find a cool, placid people in a volcano's shadow. It is told that a lady left her Taormina villa because, she declared, Etna wouldn't let her sleep. Invalids come and

are cured not by the restoring tranquillity their London doctor prescribed, but by the absorption from earth and air and people of a little of their inexhaustible store of energy and their fierce gusto for the simple fact of living.

Life is old in Sicily. Before men were the gods. Three hundred years before the birth of Christ Syracuse was the greatest city of the new western world, and the medieval era that is only yesterday is still stamped unmistakably strong on the Sicilian faces of today. Yet there are no people who are more inherently young, no land where men and women, old and worn in body, work and laugh and sorrow, sing and hate, with such a persistent and unseemly youth. An old toothless gaffer can howl with gusty mirth, an ancient hag with a jar of water on her head can, on occasion, pause and execute a lively *pas de seul* on the rough paving stones of the street. At seventy the Sicilian fights and loves and labors like any careless, hot-blooded chap of twenty and five. Ten-year-old boys who have worked from dawn till dark carrying buckets of cement up two flights of ladder, rush out at evening to fill the piazza with their games, the bedlam of noise and the dangerous swirl of their tireless bodies. Three nights ago a phonograph in an alley of laborers' dwellings blared Verdi, Puccini, yes, Wagner! until close to dawn, and each disk was applauded by hearty bravos from the dark, but unsleeping houses about. Perhaps it is not only English women whom Etna delights to keep awake.

No, a Sicilian is not a tranquil soul. Virgil wrote—"Etna thunders with horrible ruins"—and on a recent

afternoon the village of Mascali was buried under fifty feet of molten rock. On through the ages Sicily has been a battleground of Greeks, Carthaginians, Athenians, Romans, Normans, Spaniards and French, Garibaldi and his Thousand—turmoil, not tranquillity. Only a few years ago the violent and medieval Mafia reigned.

The modernism of Palermo and Catania—motors, shops, opera, factories—is an incomplete Sicily without the hill towns of Enna, of Troina, of Nicosia, the grey, huddled Modica in the south, the high, coastal Sciacca. These are also Sicily. Standing out from the walled harbor of Sciacca go the long fishing boats, lateen sailed, as if to ravage an enemy coast, and above the town rise the castles of the Spanish di Luna and the Sicilian di Perollo families whose century of bloody vendetta spread over all the island. Troina is still the citadel that Count Roger, the Norman, and his bride defended against the siege of Saracen hordes. These places are the Middle Ages, not as the Doric temples of Agrigento are ancient Greece, nor as Monte San Giuliano is a shrine of dim Phœnician gods, nor even as Florence is Renaissance or Rome Cæsar's, for here in these Sicilian towns the past seems still to live, not alone in inanimate things but in customs, manners of thought, in the proud, wary eyes of men and in the black-hooded figures of the women. All the sharply chiselled strength and cruelty and courage and swift danger of that other day is not something to be reconstructed out of ruins, but a part of a living world. What we are pleased to call civilization circles Sicily only with the sea.

This island of volcano has bred proud men and

the successive spoliation by strangely-mixed races has moulded complex, unstable men, law defying and arrogant in their resistance. The Sicilian of today may have little love for his own Sicily and no love at all for the larger Italy, but he has a great insatiable love for himself. His self-esteem is often ridiculous, frequently exasperating, and it can be dangerous. It involves him in all kinds of stupidities, in futile emotions, and it binds him to outworn formulas—a medieval church and the same plow that Ovid described. It may seem to place his women on a level only a little above the women of the East, but also it gives him in this our era of an enforced acceptance of the socialized, organized, standardized man, a vivid primary color, a tang, a flavor that to some of us is good to taste. The Sicilian, the true Sicilian, is not a dish for either the timid or the unadventurous of palate, for he is not unlike the island cooking—one needs for both hunger and curiosity and a little courage thrown in.

I have been speaking of the more remote, the less frequented parts of the island, yet this same, prevailing, strongly-characteristic flavor may be found in the tight-clothed swagger of the bland youths of Palermo itself, in the snarling imprecations of an outraged *facchino* at any railroad station, in the begging cripple on any street, even in the tourist-petted youths of Taormina. The illiterate *contadino* will regard you cautiously, coldly out of narrow dark eyes; you will think evilly, before he asks you to have a friendly glass of his wine, a bit of his new bread and a dried fig.

A man's island; but in this fact once more there is

a Sicilian paradox to be met. Although its women are negative and all but self-effacing, still in slavery, still in the medieval castello, and only men crowd the piazzas and are free and resplendent, carrying the brave plumage, singing the loud, shrill song, none the less, Sicily is a southern island in a southern ocean and these same men are southern and Latin elements in that unbroken Mediterranean racial stream—"feminine,"—not nordic-male. They are more than Latin, for Sicily is Arabic and Greek and Spanish as well as Roman. Thus their dominance (a mastery over their wives if not over themselves) is rather like the devious, cruel tyranny of a woman over another woman, and sometimes it seems wholly despicable and often shadowed and unfair. Yet they are so gay, these men, so ingratiating; impudent but seldom vulgar, clever but seldom wise, pleasantly absurd children and also very, very old, age-weary men. They are overflowing with those warm, quick emotions and rare intuitive virtues and the over-ripe vices of their kind. They are like the dramatic tangle of peaks that are not really as high mountains as they seem to be, yet no less impressive for this, and they are a little like the snarl of rough mule paths that thread them—something that beckons and promises, but that is guarded by their own labyrinth that no one, much less they, themselves, has ever been able to follow through to a clear end.

The Fire Island is not tranquillity. We northerners do not care to live too long in Sicily. After all, one doesn't feel quite comfortably at ease sitting astride an active volcano.

The Saints

II

WHAT the bull-fight is to Spain, or a review of citizen troops to Fascist Italy, the religious festa is to island Sicily. It is all the tense excitement of the arena, the thrill of parade, and in addition, it is Belief, and the material barter of pots and pans, and gay carnival all rolled into one and conveniently labeled with the name of a patron saint—Filippo, Lucia, Giuseppe, Rosalie. In honor of these names the Sicilian finds the joy of expressing in significant symbols both their greatness and his own. Never content with words alone as a means of conveying his thoughts, he needs must employ constantly that vivid pantomime of gesture which "acts" his passing emotions, which externalizes and portrays Himself, and for the same reason his religion seems to him a poor, dead thing indeed, until he creates for it the dramatic pageantry of which he, himself, is a vital part. On the name days of the saints, at Christmas, at the Immacolata, at Easter, at Corpus Domini, he gives himself over to Festa body and soul. He is not the one to practice self-restraint. A foreigner is never sure whether he is watching religious ritual or bacchic carnival and concludes that it must be a peculiar Sicilian mixture of the two. For it is apparent that to any Sicilian a procession brave with music and banners, brilliant with lights and deafening with bombs is such sheer joy in itself,

that its significance immediately falls into minor importance, and with the same enthusiasm he follows both the gay *vara* of the pagan carnival queen and the no less resplendent *vara* of his Christian saint. He happens to believe passionately in so many things, the Sicilian: in Himself, in Carnival, in God, and he asks only to be allowed to celebrate this faith with color and movement and a splendid din. It is very shocking; it is primitive and savage, but in Sicily festa will be a long time dying out.

However much the older social customs and beliefs may have changed, these island people still regard their religion as a personal and intimate affair. It is spiritual, yes, but far more essential, it is the spiritual expressed in something to be looked at with the eyes and touched with the hands. There must be that physical contact, that warm nearness to the loved and revered one, a body to body approach that jams them happily together around the small marble top of a café table, crushes them pleasantly in the center of any crowd and throws them before an image, clinging and caressing with an astonishing and even a repulsive abandonment. Their worship is wholly human and sensual, for it is only a developed intellect that tries the delicate operation of separating the emotions one from another, saying, this love is the body's and earthy, and this other is the soul's and divine. In the Sicilian's single southernness, he loves, he hates, he laughs, he cries; he has no less love than complete love, and for him there is no middle course between a shout of joy and a very deluge of tears.

A Religious Festival

In the divine Hierarchy recognized by the people of the island—the peasants at least—God who is the vague, the distant, the immaterial, occupies an unimposing place. Always predominant in their thoughts and their affections are the lowly patron saints, these canonized men and women whose faces are as familiar to them as their mother's, who grant and withhold and are rewarded or reprimanded, whom they take out to the blare of brass and the music of their own singing, to whom the smallest child may run with the smallest grief and to whom the oldest may hobble. He has been chosen much as a magistrate is placed in office, and he can be deposed at will. If the *contadini* give him a church, give him their love and their faithful worship, offer him gifts of the first grain and fruits and oil, and the first loaf of their baking, if they name their sons for him, then he must recompense them by his protection, grant their prayers and punish their enemies, cure their bodily ills, bring good harvests to their soil and, at droughts, send life-giving rain. It is a simple, frank, man-to-man relation.

At Lecata it was the custom to send to the patron, Sant' Angelo Gerosolimitano, the Christ in person (who was regarded as his inferior), who asked Sant' Angelo on their behalf for rain. If rain was not forthcoming, the saint was carried to the water's edge and there they themselves renewed the request, declaring, "Give us water or we will throw you into the sea!" It is told that the faithful Nisseni, feeling the injustice of the withholding of a rain from heaven, or a harvest that has been poor, divest their venerable San Michele of his

splendid robes and trappings and replace them with poor, ragged garments; then, without candles and in significant silence, they take him to another smaller church to "do penitence" there. Only when the rain comes do they bring him back, but not without saying to him as he passes through the streets on his way to reinstatement, "You see, San Micheluccio, how pallid you are? So then, this was necessary to intimidate you?" Or they cry, "Jesus of my heart! Look at San Micheluccio, what a mortified face he has!"

Not infrequently the image of the Christ is taken out of the church and followed by men in black robes and wearing crowns of thorns about their heads, to be immersed in the public fountain as a reminder of their vital needs, and often the countless small images and pictures of saint and Madonna that adorn and protect the house itself are disciplined by hanging them head downward or by locking them away in a drawer.

"Grant my prayer and I will give you my watch!" they cry.

"Cure my child and I will carry to your shrine a candle worth fifty lire!" It is a bargain, a just trade.

At Calatabiana, on the eastern coast below Taormina, each year the men carry the black San Filippo down the mile of dangerously steep path from his high isolate church to the *duomo* of the town and the faster the descent is made the better will be the next vintage. There seemed to us who watched, something very fitting in such a cannon-ball descent of the twisting rocky path, which still results occasionally in bruises and broken bones, for is not this saint of shining black, the black of

a polished boot, of the darting eyes and forked short beard, an old and potent exorciser of the devil he may be thought to resemble? He is no kindly milk-and-mush saint, is San Filippo, but a fit opponent of the arch-devil himself, and when he comes down from his eerie under the ruined Norman castello to save his people who have been infested by the Black One, the Dark Soul, he comes with a rush, a slither and slide, that warns his enemy that a fight to the finish is imminent and no quarter will be given or asked.

One likes San Filippo Nero. He is solidly wooden and very old and in this world he exists from halo to waist only. His *vara* is plain and battered and strong, as it must be to survive, but he is clothed in mellow white satin and silver, and he holds a delicately-wrought silver flower in the long black fingers of the hand that tears out demons. He has dignity and authority and he loves best a good fight.

San Pancrazio of Taormina also is black, but a warmer, ruddier, more paternal color; that of weathered and ripe old age. His church is triumphantly built on the stones of the temple of Apollo Archagetas, as befits the dwelling-place of the venerable first Bishop to pagan Sicily.

These are counted as small saints of small villages whatever may be their abilities and their antiquity. It is Santa Rosalie of Palermo, she who was once the daughter of a Norman Baron, Santa Lucia of Syracuse, Sant' Agatha of Catania, who has a crown given her by the English Richard Cœur de Lion and at Messina, the Virgin della Lettera—these are the resplendent

saints of Sicily whose festas draw thousands and last many days. Yet their very magnificence steals from their personalities the sense of intimate actuality, and their fame has robbed them of the irresistible charm of some old San Giuseppe in his poor village church or sitting at ease on his modest *vara* when he is carried about the streets in March. Sant' Agatha in her jewels becomes only the great lady she was before her martyrdom in 251, while a home-made wooden San Pietro close by fishing boats drawn up along the shore is always a potent symbol of the faith of these men who mend their nets in the shadow of his church.

Across the island on its northern coast, is the monastery sanctuary of a black Virgin, the miracle-working Madonna del Tindari. We went to Tindari not knowing what we were to find there, or rather we went to see the monastery which, I am bold enough to state, holds the most beautiful situation in the island, also to look at the few bits of the Greek city. Only casually we knew about a Madonna as, without knowing, we would have assumed there was one, or some other saint that would do quite as well to give reason to the building. We did not know about our dark Lady of Tindari. How could one think to find her in Sicily or in any European town? She is not European, nor Sicilian, with her long, thin face, her high, narrowing forehead, her dwelling yet sightless eyes and the disturbing, fatal enigma of her lips. Hers is the beauty that might lie hidden in a primitive African carving come out of the unknown depths of heat and strangeness and primordial life. In her dim niche, her shoulders covered with old, dull

TO THE COOL AND DRIPPING BASIN OF THE VILLAGE FOUNTAIN HOUSEWIVES COME CONTINUALLY TO FILL THEIR LARGE AMPHORAE AND SPREAD THE LATEST GOSSIP.

THE TINY SICILIAN DONKEY AND THE CURB RESTAURANT ARE FAMILIAR SIGHTS IN ALL THE LARGER SICILIAN TOWNS.

vestments, she is gently, darkly glowing; faintly radiant, but with no light of our day, nor of any outside day. She is all mystery and veiled sorcery and within her lies some subtle and occult power. She is not Christian and to think this would be only sacrilege to that faith. Her ritual is not chanted to her by these priests, nor are her prayers those the pilgrims say. She waits forever, a foreigner in the small, windowless chapel, in the hushed center of the monastery, the whole heart, the whole essence of belief; a thing beautiful and yet fearful, good and yet terribly evil, the first and the last goddess. She is the symbol of no woman, no man, but she seems to hold in her silence vast implications and one could worship her, silent also, while all of one's being was vibrant as with some essential unquiet, some ultimate movement of life—of life? It comes slowly, this question, and repeats itself—of life? Is it of life she is an image? Might she not be a symbol of a dark beauty we only know to call death?

A kindly, thread-bare little priest will take you in to see this Madonna with the Child on her arm, and he will tell you the story of her miraculous discovery that is like the miraculous discovery of all the other Madonnas up and down Catholic lands. He will invite you to walk in the charming bit of garden, the wall of which drops hundreds of feet sheer into the sea, and he will stand with you on a terrace to look out to the Æolian islands and to Stromboli, the volcano, and eastward to the cape of Milazzo reaching far out from the Sicilian shore. He will recount how once there was an earthquake and how the Greek city of Tyndaris

slipped down and was buried in the sea below. Yes, he avers, men have thought of trying to recover the treasure of Hellenic gold. But these matters, you will feel, are trivialities; this ocean and this superb situation above it and this garden, that is all a monastery garden should be, for you will remember an image and a disturbing question that you will never answer, but that will go with you up and down the earth. You will go back to Tindari. Yes, in the end you will return to the Dark Lady again.

Later I will write of another Madonna, she of the lonely river valley above Melia and the night festa that becomes, before morning, purely pagan; and also of a Saint Joseph that I know. For a festa is Sicily at its best, at its most typical and revealing moment, when it forgets that it should appear modern and that it should not startle the timid *forestiere* too much. At these times it becomes pure Island, cut away from the European mainland by that strip of turbulent water which, if narrow, yet by significance means so much.

Miracle

III

FOR three hours our carrozza climbed the unrelenting slope of Etna from Catania to the village of Trecastagni; from the most modern and uninteresting city of Sicily to the few hundred houses and the church of Saint Alfeo, Saint Delfio and Saint Cirino; to Saint Alfeo, the miracle worker, who has not lost his power nor his cunning.

With half-naked men running past us, shouting, carrying their huge candles garlanded with flowers, with pilgrims walking slowly beside us, with bicycles and farm carts, city carriages like our own, and automobiles and donkeys, we made the night pilgrimage up the seven climbing miles and stood at last in the wide doors of the church at May dawn. Behind us were the treeless, vineyard-covered slopes to the sea, the sun just risen over the veiled mountains of distant Calabria, and about us the Sicilian world, odorous, fresh and new. Before us was the church, the smoky flames of dripping candles, the unquiet, apprehensive movement of tense bodies, the whimper of tired children, the ecstatic shouts of the kneeling, the distraught gestures of the speechless supplicants and, over the altar, the shut, floridly ornate gilt doors of the shrine. Again the rasping cry came from behind us—"Viva Sant' Al——!" now a single word after the miles of breathless repetition, and past us, running

with new energy came one of the *nudi*, a youth in white shorts, a sash of brilliant scarlet about his waist, another across his bare shoulders, a red fillet binding his head, and a candle, taller than himself, and thicker than his own two arms, wound with scarlet ribbon and with flowers. He rushed to the altar rail. His cry was abrasive and shrill; not a name, but now only an exultant, lifted shout—"*Sant' Alfeo!*" Behind him came two more, then three. They lit their heroic yellow candles and all the church called with them—"Sant' *Alfeo!*" And the mutes close by the altar stretched out imploring arms and swayed, voicelessly praying for the miracle of speech.

There was no service, no mass; nothing to detract from the screen of newly-gilded metal that concealed the miraculous face of Saint Alfeo. There was no music to temper cries that were for Saint Alfeo's ears alone; nor any chanted ritual to soften the angled gestures of those clutched hands. There were no priests, only this ugly church and the candles enfeebled by the dawn, these people oblivious to the splendid light and warmth spreading again over the earth and somewhere, hidden away from sight, was their saint.

More *nudi* came. One limped on bare bruised feet, one carried on his shoulders a young child who, like the candles of the others, was flower-garlanded as if for sacrifice. The infant clung fast. A woman whispered, "A deaf mute, *il poveretto*," and then we understood why it was not more terrified by the bedlam of frantic noise.

It was not yet five. The sun was hot. The rude piazza was a maze of arriving carts and people all jammed together, a snarl of locked wheels and colliding animals. Whips cracked. Men cursed and laughed. Donkeys brayed. Whole families hurried up to the wide doorway, elbowing through the throng, their eyes only on the dim interior, and their lips already murmuring. A bog-fight. Arrogant, watchful carabiniere. Booths were already selling cheap religious trinkets, lemonade and straw hats. A business-like little fellow in a repellent green suit whistled five-year-old American jazz as he laid out with a syncopated clatter his stock of pots and pans. We walked in the opposite direction from the village on the edge of which the church stands, and had breakfast of bread and fruit and Etna's good wine in the quiet of an olive tree's shade.

A chance train acquaintance had persuaded us that we would see the beginning of Saint Alfeo's festa only at Catania. We had planned to stop at Aci Reale which was nearer to Trecastagni and, early in the morning, drive on from there. A third class coach is always helpful with its ready flow of friendly comment and advice, which agrees with the Sicilian's inexactness and his fine scorn of all stupidly literal truth. A rotund and voluble gentleman of the train said that the *mudi* started from Catania; these men were not exactly nude, he reassured us, although they had been stark naked enough in his grandfather's day, who ran all the distance over the road. And the carts! Did we know about the carts? Well, one must also see them start from Catania. Once

they were raced through the streets, hundreds of the painted carts—we had seen these? We assured him we had for we had then been in Sicily six months. Six months? He was aghast. Was it so! He was delighted. He said Sicily was very beautiful, in fact a superlatively beautiful land, *un paese bellissimo*, so rich, so gracious, so sunny—ah! He all but embraced us in his enthusiasm for his native island, but he restrained himself and presented the lady with the rose he wore.

Then we had seen the beautiful Sicilian carts so gaily painted, so amusing. But we had not see them loaded with people, he was sure, racing through the Catania streets at the beginning of their pilgrimage to the saint. In earlier times it was a mad race indeed, he assured us, the whole twelve kilometri; a race of hundreds of carts, horses driven to their death, lashed until they were streaming red, and collisions, and broken bones—all this was quite true. Yes, and the running nude men also, for in this earlier day they beat their shoulders and breasts cruelly with switches, their bare feet were torn and sometimes a very old man, perhaps expiating a sin, dropped dead along the way. Our friend shuddered. He was plainly a mild, ease-loving soul and he writhed at his own recital, he suffered from his own eloquence. Yet he recovered to reassure the lady that now all this was changed; she would not be disturbed, the runners were clothed—he made a gesture that meant they were sufficiently clothed—and no horses or men were killed. Since the war, since Fascismo, those things, he said firmly, were no longer allowed. But it was still something for *forestieri* to see.

We thanked him, exchanged cards, and we were invited to his house in Giarre, insisting, in our turn, that he come to see us in Taormina. We shook hands and saluted Romanamente and, impressed by his advice, we kept on to Catania.

With a room engaged at the Hotel d'Italia that looked down from a balcony on a small piazza, a widening of the Corso, with a call left for four o'clock so that the first special autobus could be taken, with the wholly virtuous decision to get what rest we could against the coming long wearying day of festa, we beheld the first of these promised *nudi*. The crowd below stirred, a cart raced by, the crowd shouted, more runners in the distance were heard calling on their saint. The two cars careened past, wheel to wheel and, just out of sight, collided and tipped over. The crowd laughed and cheered and ran to give their aid. Into all this confusion, walking slowly with quiet dignity, unmindful of the spectators who still lined the sidewalk, came a grey-haired woman in respectable black, barefooted, bare-headed, a single candle held like a crucifix before her as she went towards this distant shrine.

A vacant carrozza stood just below and the passing of those devout pilgrims, the clattering carts and the cries of the *nudi* were irresistible. In half an hour we were also on the road.

The night was still. Outside of the city the small properties began; grapes and lemons and oranges shut behind walls overhung with flowering vines. The sharp edge of shadows from a half-moon cut across the hard white road. Looming and glistening in the radiance,

as if they had been wet, stood a row of stone pines, or a single sentinel cyprus guarded a wayside shrine.

In an hour we were in an unbroken stream of vehicles and walkers. There was little noise now, animals were kept moving by slow commands; sometimes a group sang softly to a muted guitar that was hidden in the merged voices. Bare feet were soundless on the powdered dust. The votive candles many carried shone golden for an instant in a passing beam of light. Beneath carts dim lanterns hung and threw against the high wall of a house close on the road a gigantic rolling silhouette of a wheel. There was the heavy odor of deep volcanic earth and ripening fruit and the pungent smell of geranium flowering on a window ledge. Here and there in the ditch wagons were drawn up and people ate and children slept in the grass. There was no chatter, yet there was no sadness. The church, even the holiest of the saints in Sicily never command, however, the northern dead voicelessness of respect and awe. Belief can be fanatical madness, or fear, or firm hope, but it is never inaudible or inhuman. The church is too much a part of their daily lives; they are on far too familiar terms with it—building, priests, shrines, services—to be self-conscious and formal when they enter the doors. They have never been told not to smile on Sunday and normal happiness is not counted a sin on the seventh day. One would no more defend, I assume, the Catholic church in Sicily than one would champion as a place for human habitation a narrow, dark, not very sanitary Sicilian alley; both are picturesque and "old" and plainly unhealthy. Yet there is a fine human quality

about any *duomo*, open equally to beggars and blowing dust, to children playing casually in the shadow of its columns, to a man lost in prayer, to lovers whispering together, and to a stray dog.

Here on the road the May night's luminous darkness distorted and magnified everything until the senses were merged into a single apprehensiveness and odors became ponderable, contoured; sight was like a fragrance and sound brushed over us and was felt as though it could have been taken in the hand. These whispering roadside voices seemed a part of the pine branches overhead as they moved a little in the wind, and the shadowed wheel rolling along the wall was the sound of all wheels on the road, as the high, blank wall itself was the silence of the enclosed vineyards that dropped slowly down to the sea.

Our driver, who walked beside the wagon step, turned finally to point out ahead the few lights of Trecastagni above us up the hill and, as if all eyes along the road had seen these also, the pace quickened, a whip cracked. In a moment we were passed by a crowded cart, the people swaying dangerously on the chairs set between the low sideboards, as the driver swung it into the ditch and tried to edge into the line that was already nose to tailboard. A brusque voice admonished them to keep their place. Other carts that followed this impatient leader soon made a double line in the narrowing road.

"Up this hill," our own driver said, "they had the final race. It was a sight! Something to see! What lashing! Fights, too. The racers didn't mind whether they

struck the animals or the people in the carts they were trying to get ahead of. The carabiniere don't permit it now."

The impulsion to forge ahead at any cost had not died out. There was this last steep, rocky hill to the village, then the level paved length of street, and at its opposite end the church—San Alfeo! The road had been well patrolled by these soldier-police. "There were many robberies," we were told, and now it needed, it was plain, only a very little less restraint to turn this present movement into a mad battle for the summit. Men shouted from behind, more carts doubled by on the run, more whips were used and the animals of their own accord strained ahead. Three *nudi* crowded through the dangerous middle strip of opening and, as they fought their way along, they made unintelligible sounds, grotesque and appalling. "They are mutes," the driver said, and laid a stubby finger on his ample moustache. "They run to San Alfeo to be cured, to be given speech."

"Are they often cured?" we asked.

"There are those," he replied, rather cryptically we thought, "who believe."

It was at noon that the saints, these three brothers, Alfeo, Delfio, and Cirino were to be revealed; taken from their sanctuary into the church, out into the open air of the piazza and then through the streets. We came back to the church often during the long, burning hot morning, and each time we found it more crowded, the air less possible to breathe, the noise, not only because of its volume, but also because of its increasing intensity and lifting pitch, less easily endured even for

the few minutes we stayed. There are certain sounds that shock the senses as by a blow, staggering and bruising, but there are others that penetrate and cry out too deeply within and become emotions whose implications, coiling, spreading, as if through the veins and all the minute channels of the mind, are like an insanity, an insidious fear. It was something as menacing as this that we went away from to stand in the open.

Fifty *nudi* had arrived. The altar steps were now packed with those who were obviously afflicted, deaf or mute, because it is these San Alfeo is reputed to cure, but also the malformed were waiting; the demented, the strangely ill, for they reason that if the saint has powers to aid the speechless, he can help the lesser maladies of the body and mind as well. Therefore all of these were allowed precedence; this few extra feet of nearness to the grill. Hung on the soiled plaster walls and conspicuously nailed to pillars were the proofs of miracles vouchsafed the faithful; crude, home-painted pictures of disasters averted, a red-spattered operating room, a falling wall, shipwrecks on impossibly turbulent seas with the good saint hovering over the distressed vessel he was protecting, crutches tagged with the name and date of their abandonment, long strings of eyeglasses thrown aside and, worse, the highly realistic wax moulds of bits of the human anatomy, of sickening cross-sections or organs portrayed with an exactness of detail and realism that neglected nothing. At tables in front of the outer shrines pictures of the saints were being sold for a couple of *soldi* and for the same trivial amount could be bought the bits of red ribbon that were

proof that the pilgrimage had been made. At midday exhausted women and children were sleeping in corners and the newly arrived were fighting their way into the center aisle.

Outside was escape into a torrid sunlight that fused movement and sight and sound. The booths circled the piazza and stretched down the street into the town where all the shops were open and filled. Every festa in Sicily is also a fair, and laid out on board tables or on the ground or carried in trays was everything that the *contadino* requires, or in the excitement and incaution of the moment he can be persuaded to buy. They were ready for his money, these tools and water-jugs, clothing and cloth and pack saddles and earthenware jars and large, coarsely woven straw hats; fire shovels and massive door locks and gay shawls; perfume and candy and eye-glasses, oranges and the large sweet lemons; tons of garlic that custom decrees must be taken home from San Alfeo; shooting ranges and racks of religious pictures, and shoes and fortune-telling devices and tinware and thread. Fishermen had brought up from the shore many kilometri away, flat baskets of sardine and anchovy and octopus. Always there are vast quantities of nuts and roasted chick peas and salted squash seeds and wooden ware and tambourines. Here was any country fair in any southern Italian or Sicilian town; a kaleidoscopic, dazzling spread of people and things; people intertwined with things; these fatal impedimenta of living, these thousands of bits that man works to obtain. Here at Trecastagni was the essence of any street of intense buying and selling, of desiring

and hesitating, caution and carelessness—the Rue de la Paix, Main Street in a Michigan village, the Bund. Girls look at five lire trinkets with the same eyes that their Roman sisters in the Via Condotti regard a window of a jeweler *di gran lusso.*

Yet in Trecastagni we turned, drawn by something we wanted to forget; turned from this pleasant, cluttered place of argument and glancing spears of light from pots and pans and shining jack-knives and from the heartening jangle and rattle of tambourines that we had sought out as relief, back into the church and found there a mass of people who had forgotten the importance of *soldi*, of driving a close trade, as they had forgotten new ribbons for themselves and bright harnesses for their animals tethered outside in the shade. That which held them drew us back to the sunless heat and candle wax and those mutely imploring hands held high above swaying heads.

We were not Catholics, but we were not tourists, spectators only. They believed passionately, wholly, these country people in that ugly interior, and from the simple purity of that faith not even a *forestiere*, a stranger both to their church and to them, could stand wholly aloof.

At noon we waited outside where the booths were deserted and, wedged hard against backs and shoulders, we faced the doors and the center aisle that gave us a clear view to the high altar. A priest in white and gold had chanted mass and the organ's finer voice continued the ritual; abruptly ceased. In the surprising silence that transformed the whole scene into a new significance, a

new world, a bell jangled its signal at last. The gaudy grille-work moved a little, a voice from the altar moaned, but the door stuck. It was jerked impatiently but it held fast. Pounding did not free it. A man in working clothes climbed out from the candles and the gilt and, as though it was no more than a coop for poultry, he tried to free it. Again it started to part in the middle and slide back. The delay had been anti-climax, but now they cried out. Here was revelation. Here was Sant' Alfeo! The long vigil before the hidden image had ended.

We could see little, but we were able to keep our feet as the hundreds pushed forward and a dozen carabinieri held them back. Yet the fluctuant swaying of the dense throng did not cease, as if its feet were tied and only its body could lean and circle and stand straight again. In ten minutes the *vara* that carried the sainted brothers was in the open doorway; golden gew-gews piled up in filigrees of tawdry, cheaply gilded iron, a scarlet brocaded canopy overhead, the three elaborate armchairs, and noise; sheer, stark noise; the noise that Sicilians reduce to its most elemental terms and then without warning let loose—a noise that only Sicilians know how to evoke, that is unique and national and much esteemed. Naturally there were bombs, but we were not prepared for the simultaneous explosion of four or five of them, and there were bells that rang out, but until now we had never heard bells rung with a true Sicilian will, and there were minor explosions, from what source we did not know. Out of small cannons fixed about the church steeple, pointing outward,

EVEN AMONG THE POORER PEASANTS A MEDIEVAL FONDNESS FOR COLOR FINDS EXPRESSION IN BRIGHT SHAWLS, EMBROIDERED COATS OR GAY SKIRTS.

ON SPECIAL OCCASIONS BRIGHTLY PAINTED CARTS AND THEIR GAILY BEDIZENED HORSES ADD GLAMOUR TO THE HARD LIFE OF THE SICILIAN PEASANT.

came at once salvos of sound and streaming colored paper. The Sicilian can also shout, but now mere human voices could not be heard, or they seemed no less blaring and detonating than the rest.

The *vara* of the saints moved into the sunlight of the cleared space. It was the time for miracles. All the supplicants had followed it, clinging close with their hands to the ornate vulgarity of the breast-high platform on which two priests in white vestments and two laymen in white butcher's coats and white skull caps stood guard. Gifts began to be passed up and displayed before they were put inside of the rail, children were lifted and passed over heads and finally their faces touched Saint Alfeo's. Men were thrust down by the guardian butchers as they tried to clamber up to the images. Women fought from the rear of the crowd to the front. A naked infant was held out by one leg and arm, its frail white body making a small cross. Cured! A miracle! The noise was redoubled—a miracle! The child was displayed from side to side. The explosions of bombs and firecrackers and voices had not diminished, for only to such music does Saint Alfeo do his work. To only this furious burst of sheer dissonance is God's will done in the island of Sicily. They must wake up their saints, as though to bring alive in such a forthright manner this lump of painted plaster. They must stir him to action, threaten him and make audible and plain their demands.

Then we saw again the *nudo* who had run seven miles with the child of five on his shoulder, the little mute child, his son. In some way he had gained an in-

secure place on the platform and he held the child in one encircling arm while the other was caught about a support of the canopy. He called on the people to lift their voices higher, louder, to cry the strong "Sant' Alfeo!" that would reach the sainted ears. He was naked except for the white drawers and the sash of red that in these later days serves to symbolize the blood of the older self-torture. His chest was running with sweat. From the crowd of faces below he turned to the child and, with a violence that was his overwrought emotions, and his fervor and love, he beseeched the infant to speak the name, to call out, to find the voice and the words. He did not despair. Splendid and heroic was his faith, the faith that does indeed work miracles. There was no shadow of doubt. But the people below, all these people in the square must help him with their own faith, with their own hearts and tongues. The child clung in fear to the bare, crimson-streaked shoulder. Again and again the man faced the crowd, pleading, cursing them for their feeble assistance, and then, looking back to the child, he whispered to it. His face was drawn and tired. Suddenly he straightened and although he stood at his full height, we knew that his body had gone lax, for he looked about without comprehension and made no new entreaties. A priest put a hand on his shoulder and said something, but the man only shook his head. People below now called up their encouragement; told him that he must try again, that he must keep trying, and that they would help. He brushed his eyes. The priest still urged him not to despair, but he was like a runner at the end of his strength; he

had given what he had to give and it was not enough; he could give no more.

After this man had clambered down and gone, beaten, sorrowing, the child close in his arms, Sant' Alfeo sat in his scrolled, golden arm-chair with the same weakly effeminate, doll-like expression on his painted face, his small eyes as unseeing as ever, his tawdry trappings all about him and his impotent brothers like two replicas, on either side. The red canopy that caught in its folds the falling bits of exploded firecrackers, threatened to burn, and suddenly a tension was diverted from miracles to this commonplace emergency. We, too, as suddenly lost interest and faith in Sant' Alfeo. A living man and a child had faced a thing of stuffed and tinted plaster; the man had striven and prayed only to go silently away, and this doll-thing still received the gifts and the fulsome worship of the crowd. The festa had become an absurdity. We were ready to go. Without faith, even the kind of faith we were able to bring to Trecastagni, nothing but an imbecile racket and too much vulgar gilding was left.

We were assured that at evening the road needed the stern policing of the carabinieri, for the night is another kind of festa, of song and drinking and fighting, all along the way that takes the pilgrims home. It is called the Drunkards' Ride, but always the Sicilian must crowd thus violently close together his two extremes.

The Greek Island

IV

ALIVE with the insistent growth of all things of the earth, a tangle of vines, of flowers, of weeds, and humanly alive with a similar tangle of men, Sicily abhors death too much to allow one to assume tranquilly that a stone is worth more than a man, that any inanimate thing is comparable with any living thing. One may insist that certain very old and thus very sacred stones are, by this and that logic, by Truth and Beauty and Significance, worth incalculable sums, and one may prove it by a dozen means, but a crowded Sicilian piazza overlooking the sea, a festa, a café, a line of lemon pickers laughing down the dry *fiume* bottom at dusk, a *duomo* at high mass, a harbor alive with the tangle of voice and line above the painted hulls of the fishing craft—these too, Sicily seems to shout in one's ear, are very splendid things to see and to try to understand.

This Sicilian who has inherited all these temples, castles and Norman churches, like a man who has inherited great wealth, demands that one think of him not exclusively in terms of gold; the gold of Doric temples or of Byzantine mosaics, but also as a living person, an impossible person if one must, but at least as human kind. He thrusts himself between the traveller and the ruin he has come to see, but if he obstructs the

clear view, also he seems to give to it, in what strange fashion I do not know, something of his own animation, a fraction of the southern heat of his own body, that touches and enlivens the cold impassiveness of stone. And just as one cannot hold long aloof from Sicily, so a Doric temple of 500 B.C. is not wholly separated by these long centuries from the island on which it stands, and for better or for worse, as one may choose to think it, a human element has entered. It becomes a structure once lived in and not wholly abandoned; not just so many beautiful stones, for one is coerced into regarding it as stone-quarried and placed by men; not a pure miracle, an immaculate creation at all, but of man's devising mind and laboring body. Who built it? one is urged to ask. Who was the creator of such beauty? Who was this Gellias who burned himself and his treasure on this altar? And these men of Syracuse? Of Akragas? Names come to mind—Dionysius, Pindar, Plato, Hiero, for we are reminded that it is their dreams and their monuments that we have come to Sicily to find.

The history of Sicily that tells a little about these people is far too fantastically involved and closely woven into the great fabric of ancient and medieval times to be easily disentangled. Going about the island and carefully seeking out, or better, stumbling casually upon, Greek temples and pre-historic Sicanean cliff-dwellings, discovering the shrines of the old gods, finding a Saracen wall, a Persian inscription, a Roman amphitheatre, Gothic arches and Spanish baroque façades, Sicily seems a hopeless, a rhymeless and reasonless jumble. One cries, "But what is Sicilian?" and the

answer is, "Nothing." The people? No, not even the people. There is an Arabic type and there are fair-haired Normans, Spanish, and nearly pure Greeks. But they are Italians then? Hardly. Well, call them Sicilians after all.

There have been few dull hours in the twenty-five

Greek Sicily

hundred years of recorded Sicilian existence and before this known dawn the lives of the gods could hardly be regarded as prosaic and flat, for, as is said of a person, Sicily has "lived its life"; lived it in a lusty, full-bodied fashion. There have been many moments of great drama and a fortunate leaven of laughable farce. All of those sudden and absurd changes of mind, those unaccountable guidings of whim and those pinnacles of the heroic that, day by day, flow out of such an existence, Sicily has known.

A single compressed paragraph will make this graphically clear. It is taken from an historical work by the novelist, the late F. Marion Crawford.

"Three epochs stand out from the chaos of myth, legend, and history; the development of farming by the Sicilians, about 1200 B.C., the introduction of commerce with the Phœnicians after that time, and the gradual growth of a higher civilization under the Greeks, from the time of their landing in the eighth century before the Christian era, until the Carthaginian wars with Rome, and the subsequent wreck of Greek art and thought under the atrocious governorship of Verres, between 71 and 73 B.C., during which, with the connivance of his father, the senator, he pillaged all Sicily at his will. The Roman rule became in the fourth century, the rule of Constantinople, and next in history, when the Goths had ruled for a time, the Arabs began to take Sicily in the year 827 A.D.; the Normans came after them, completing their conquest of the island in 1091, and through them the German imperial house of Hohenstaufen, reigning from the fifth year before the preaching of the first Crusade, until the downfall of the Ghibellines in 1268. Then the French, under Charles of Anjou, during the years that ended in the Sicilian Vespers, in 1282, after which the Sicilians chose for their king Peter of Aragon, and because both he and Charles of Anjou continued afterwards to call themselves kings of Sicily, the two kingdoms of Sicily and Naples became known from that time as the "two Sicilies," and were still so called under Ferdinand the Catholic, after Naples was annexed to Aragon, and both became Spanish monarchies. In 1700 began the Spanish succession, after which Victor Amadeus of Savoy was King of Sicily for a time, until Sicily and Naples were again united under Charles the Third of the House of Bourbon. Last of

all, in 1860, the two Sicilies were united to the modern kingdom of Italy. "There is no part of Europe which has been dominated by a greater number of different races, and none where each has left such deep traces of its domination. The Goths and Vandals are the only people who ever held the South for a time and left no sign of their presence; but their holding was short, and their occupation was followed by a disappearance so sudden that their brief rule never earned the designation of a kingdom."

There are, however, two epochs that stand clearly forth, and it is the remaining impress of these that one comes to Sicily to see, or coming for whatever reason, is urged not to miss seeing—the Greek and the so-called Arabo-Norman.

The story of Syracuse on the southeastern coast is the story of the Greeks in Sicily, as that of Palermo is of the later Norman rule.

Like a spear point the fortress of Euryelos, "the broad-based," lies at the apex of the Syracusan plain, and it is only from here that Syracuse the Great, the antique Syracuse, can be fully seen. Distant is a small island of huddled buildings joined to the mainland by a short bridge, and this contracted harbor-girt mound is the Syracuse of Sicily and of today. But Cicero wrote, "You have often heard that the city of Syracuse is the greatest of the Greek cities and the most beautiful of all." And it is this metropolis of Cicero's praise that is spread out from Euryelos across a widening triangle to the sea. The eyes look over a flat, rocky barrenness and

beyond to the modest modern town at the shore, with the Great Harbor and the marsh of Syraco, which gave the name, to the right. Each mind may see what it wills; for one it is all there, this Grecian Syracuse, vast, undimmed; for another it may be only a dreary limestone plain where once lived a people, and a civilization that

Greek Syracuse

has utterly gone. There are fragments of walls, but do they enclose more than a waste of goat pasturage? Does the tumbled fortress defend only the feeble scattering of old olive trees? Yet it was this wall, more than three miles in length, that Dionysius, the tyrant, completed in twenty nights and days with his sixty thousand men and six thousand ox carts drawing stone from the quarries; and it was on the building of this fortress of Euryelos that he expended all his knowledge of war-

fare and six years of labor. It is still impressive with its ditches and galleries and underground passages and storerooms and quarters for troops, but more than the thing itself is its location, looking over a city, "so great" Cicero reported, "that it may be said to consist of four cities of the largest size," whose people have been numbered as many as a million, and whose wealth, even after its decline and spoliation by the Romans, was an unbelievable sight as it met the invading Saracen eyes.

For sixteen hundred years Syracuse dominated the island and, at its prime, rivalled Athens itself. Its significance transcended the purely insular for it stood all this while an outpost to the westward, defending Greeks and Greek civilization against the threat of Carthage, as Athens faced an equivalent menace from the East. When Syracuse and its Sicilian allies defeated the whole power of Carthaginian arms at Himera in 480 B.C., the Athenians halted Xerxes at Marathon. The sixty years following this double victory, a period of peace and prosperity for both homeland and Sicilian colony, was that greatest, Periclean golden age of Greek life at its supreme height.

At the beginning of this interval Syracuse was ruled by the first Hiero, a tyrant generous and wise and beauty loving, a patron of the arts and a builder of theaters and temples. All of Sicily was fabulously wealthy, and it was the new West, a lure, envied and coveted. It happened to be Athens herself who, persuaded by that paragon Alcibiades, sent in 413 B.C. the superb

army and fleet that wrecked itself on the Syracusan shore; who sent a second under Demosthenes that the Spartan Gylippus, hastily called in, annihilated, while from Hiero's theater all Syracuse watched as though it were another vast spectacle ordered for the delight of their eyes. No Athenian men or ships went back and few Athenians survived, except for the seven thousand who suffered worse than death in the quarry pits of the city they had set out to conquer.

Dionysius, the cruel and cunning and iron-willed, built the walls and the fortress Euryelos, defeated another invasion of Carthage and ruled for thirty-eight years, "one of the most extraordinary men of any age; he saved Hellenism from destruction in the central Mediterranean, and he reduced chaos to order in founding a new and powerful state; but he destroyed freedom and the very meaning of it, root and branch." Following him came Timolean, the republican, the well-loved, and then Agathocles. When Agathocles was at last poisoned by his slave the Roman Empire had been born and already its hands reached out toward Sicily.

Across the isthmus, a half hour's drive by carriage from the modern city that keeps to the confines of what was the ancient fortress of Ortygia, hewn out of the rock of the plateau's edge so that it faces the waters of the Great Harbor and looks out over them to the far shore, is the theater of Hiero, one of the finest and largest of these Greek structures. This is superb in itself and impressive in its implication and its power to gather up and give to the beholder, not only the great wealth of its historical associations but also the finer,

if less tangible, gift of its spirit, its genius, which was Greek. In fact, it might be said that all of what I have called for convenience's sake the "Greek Island," is here summed up as, for that matter, the total of Greece itself.

Anyone going to theatres of this type, frequented as they invariably are by every category of tourist, will always find these travellers sitting, in groups or singly, on a high tier of seats; silent, contemplative and absorbed. There they remain, for once it would seem unhurried, no matter how pressing the fixed schedule of their hours or how hectic the diffusion of their thoughts between this and that incongruity of impression and conclusion; now at last calm, held securely in this interior of stone. There is no mass of detail to delight them, nor any striking strangeness to still them; only an emptiness, only this descending interior cone marked off by the swinging lines of the seats that swirl away in movement and that seem to lift this huge mass, transforming it into an imponderable velocity. Implanted in earth as firmly as anything could be fixed there, these theatres are, nevertheless, finely dynamic and free, as one would feel this freedom on entering a curving bay of the coast, backed by a ring of mountains and sheltered, yet open seaward to all the ends of the world. Although the many indentations of the rough Grecian coast may have supplied a familiar model for these structures, this "openness" was of the Greek mind rather than merely a copied conformation of a bit of their land.

At the theatre of Syracuse one feels a serene and cool,

grey pleasure in the progressive unity that is almost geometric and Euclidian, complete, and in all the integral rightness of symmetry and the perfection of a true circle which, let it be said, the mind completes; not the stone itself, for that would be only intolerable and imprisoning. (The Colosseum at Rome, for instance, is just this last; a pointed commentary on the essential difference between the two civilisations.) Shorn of everything but its bare structure, such a theatre becomes as vital as a symbol, as if these Greeks had sought and found an ultimate beauty by reducing all the innumerable possible elements and variations to this final balanced simplicity of linear and spacial curvature, this pure and moving form. Pure yet complex, for if one walks around the wider upper level of this theatre of Syracuse, at every step the structure changes to reveal new, unpredicted possibilities, becoming as freshly enlivened as a Greek statue of a man seems to be when, moving here and there about it, one feels the strong animation and flow of the form, until it "comes alive," not in any dull, reproductive surface manner we may be very sure, but truly and profoundly so, unhampered by any limitations of living muscle and flesh. So does this theatre seem, and thus from the first it provided a worthy center in which Greek life was so often concentrated, to which came their plays and their choruses and dances and processions of masks, their poets and statesmen and athletes. On these stages that faced these same curving segments of stone, they, the actors in whatever drama was to be played and the thousands who, as spectators before them, lined the concave surface

that cut the clear sky like the arc of a horizon beyond which only a non-Grecian chaos existed, were all drawn into a single, secure unity of understanding, into a single focused mind. It was this single mind, so virile and strong and finely coordinated, that gave to those tragedies and odes and orations, as to even the more

Theater at Syracuse

trivial diversions of the day, that quality of greatness that we despair of ever really comprehending and end by weakly calling "Greek." I have mentioned the strangely silent calm of the usually harassed tourists. Just what it may be they contemplate here in this empty Syracusan theatre I do not know, yet I repeat that for once they are quiet and for once, I hazard the guess, they are forgetful both of the too-crowding wonders of

the day before and the thrilling, beckoning promise of the day to come. Something they find here suffices, and neither the fretful impatience of the guide nor the hungry neigh of the horse that will finally take them back to a cold supper at their pensione, stirs them from their dreams, or it may be, and this too is very beautiful, at long last a space of tranquil rest. No picture, no carving, no church, no palace, no land nor seascape will accomplish this while the flush and fever of travel is on them—only one of these theatres out of ancient Greece.

Here at Syracuse, it is pleasant to remember, were first recited the poems of Simonides who remarked that his work filled two chests, the one with gold and the other with praises—but that when in need he always found the latter quite empty. It was this same worldly, talented Greek who was asked by the ruler of Rhegium to write an ode in celebration of the victory of his mules at the Olympics, but finding the recompense too small, objected that he could not debase his genius by writing about such lowly animals. The price was promptly increased to a sum that the poet could not refuse, but he extricated himself from the dilemma by referring to the animals only as, "All hail, ye daughters of wind-swift mares," and Syracuse and Athens smiled.

But there could have been no dramatic masterpiece which held the tragic significance of those other performances in this theatre when, from time to time, an Athenian prisoner was drawn up from the hell of the

FROM THE FIRST THE THEATRE AT SYRACUSE PROVIDED A WORTHY CENTER FOR GREEK LIFE. HERE WERE PRODUCED SOME OF THE GREATEST PLAYS OF ANTIQUITY.

THE TAWNY GOLDEN COLUMNS OF THE TEMPLE OF CONCORD AT GIRGENTI ARE SET WELL APART FROM THE MODERN TOWN AMID OLIVE AND ALMOND ORCHARDS.

stone quarries and placed on the stage to face the thousands of Syracusans that he might recite for them the odes of Euripides and the older Greek poets, thus gaining, if he could, their applause and his freedom which was his life as well. A single man in a rude yellow gown thrown over his shoulders to hide his thin raggedness, strove with the help of the poets to win release and Athens again.

Timolean, who came to Sicily and Syracuse to free it from tyranny grown intolerable, was often carried here in his venerable age and blindness to listen to orations which concerned affairs of primal importance to the republic he had established, and to speak his councils which were accepted as the words of the oracles of the gods.

Hiero, Dionysius, Timolean and—Agathocles. Thus went Syracuse and all Sicily followed. For twenty years after Timolean's death Syracuse was peaceful and prosperous, but then came, with a suddenness that is thoroughly Sicilian, even volcanic, the adventurer and gambler, the first to call himself King of Sicily, a man of heroic unquiet, made of two parts bandit and one part god, great in military genius and despicable in treachery, yet always so splendid in action that one forgets, as did his own people, the long suffering if not the violent death into which his mad ambitions constantly led them. They hated him and feared him and they followed him with the same fascination that every school-boy feels when he first encounters the story of this Greek; when he shudders perhaps, but reads breathlessly on. There is a temptation to write that

Agathocles was "Sicilian," and it is quite the accepted thing to accent the drop of Greek blood that may still run in the veins of the islanders of today. "Sicily is so Greek, don't you think?" Agathocles is not Sicilian, yet something of his exploits, his inexhaustible store of dashing, passionate energy, his equally sudden entrance into and complete abandonment of projects, no matter what the cost—to others!—and his insistence on his own safety whatever might be the peril of his followers, which dulls miserably the brilliance of an undoubted heroism, his exquisite craft and his brutal cruelty—no, one would not say that all this was Sicilian, although something of it is not un-Sicilian, and it must be left inconclusively at that.

Agathocles was born on the island; born, it seems, immediately into danger, for the local oracle of the village saw fit to predict a disastrous future for the day-old infant and, obedient to instructions, the father took it out and left it on a hillside to die. The mother, however, secretly rescued the child, yet fearing the result of her act, she fled across the mountains to Syracuse and here it was that the boy grew up. He was tall, strong and handsome, impetuous always and a braggart, a perfect leader of the gang that gathered around him. Yet he was no mere bully, for finding himself befriended by a wealthy merchant, he became a suave man of fashion, clever and at ease in this new world, wholly able to cope with it and even to shine. On the death of his protector, an event one must suspect him of having some share in, he very promptly married the widow and immediately, master as he now was of great wealth,

strode forward along his destined road. His way through life was to have violent fluctuations, but also his progress was to be as spectacular as his abilities were exceptional and his methods ruthless. He was banished only to return, he lost an encounter only to win the next until, times and conditions being favorable, a high military command was secured and then, allying himself with the opposition, he soon dominated it and executed an audacious *coup* of the usual Greek character which ended in the outright slaughter of some four thousand of the ruling citizens, the confiscation of vast property, and the fleeing into exile of all others who had opposed him. At one stroke, a bloody one, Agathocles was absolute tyrant of Syracuse.

Sicily had become disunited under the just and benevolent Timolean. Carthage, which had gained control of many of the Sicilian cities either by capture or treaty, had also secured power in Syracuse itself and it was Hamilcar, one of many of this great name, who aided Agathocles to win this highest office. But this Carthaginian died and, as the island was quickly forming again into a solidified Greek state under the strong hand of despotism, continued friendship with the African nation was no longer possible and both sides prepared feverishly for yet one more inevitable encounter. When they finally met near Akragas, it was Agathocles who suffered a crushing defeat, losing thousands of his men. He fell back helplessly on Syracuse while the enemy with its greatly superior forces moved up to besiege him there. It was now that he executed the famous Agathoclean maneuver, so typical of the man and

the Greek. He left a small force in the city (which he casually abandoned to whatever fate might be in store for it) and with all that was left of his beaten army and his ships, he boldly set sail for Africa to conquer the country that, to all intents and purposes, had just conquered him. No other Greek had ever dared invade this land or had even dreamed of such an action.

The voyage across the sea was a thrilling race in which Agathocles barely led the great Carthaginian fleet that, contrary to his plans, did not stay in Sicily to despoil the city he had left as lure. The only hope of the Greek, however, was land and when at last they drove their few vessels on the beach, Agathocles then and there performed the deed unequalled in sheer bravado and daring, which has come down through history to identify and mark this man. The boats, he knew, were a temptation to abandon this reckless adventure. He calmly told his army that their miraculous escape from the enemy ships had been due to the gods and that he had sworn to sacrifice, in return, no less than his own boats; all of them. He burned them where they lay. Victory or annihilation; there was to be no alternative.

Fighting, as now they must, with mad desperation, finely commanded by one who believed he could not fail, yet who did not neglect to use every means in his power to win, aided by luck or the gods or both, the little army of fifteen thousand Sicilian Greeks made their way through the desert, not only to survive, but very nearly to succeed in conquering this unconquerable land. Agathocles might have completely won it, and

perhaps he thought it already was his, or he may have tired suddenly of his desert field of action like a child who lets a new toy fall to the floor. Whatever his reasons, he went back to Sicily ostensibly to subdue Akragas that during his absence had risen to new power. When he returned to Africa, where his army, left under the command of a son, had been repeatedly defeated, and saw the vast forces that Carthage now had gathered to defend its land, he appraised the situation at a glance and with no discernible spark of loyalty to the men who had fought so long and so splendidly for him, nor even the faintest trace of personal responsibility, but rather with a cold cowardice unbelievable in such a man, he turned his back treacherously on his soldiers and planned to flee alone, by night, in a single ship for safety and home. He was discovered as he was about to embark and put in chains by his son like any miserable deserter. Yet an attack was imminent and, using it as a pretext, he pled dramatically to be allowed to share in the battle, to fight as a soldier, not as a general or a king; only to aid with his body and sword. He cried that he now stood before them only as a Greek, a common man. They cheered. They demanded that he lead them again as their general. He refused. They urged him anew. He protested. They implored him to save them in their need. So he was released. His treachery they had forgotten. He was Agathocles and, remembering the past, they even saw victory and the spoils of great Carthage theirs to claim. Grasping this bit of good fortune, Agathocles again stole away and boarded a ship for Sicily. When the outraged and desperate Greeks dis-

covered this they murdered the son he had left behind and then, of necessity, defeated as they were by Agathocles himself more than by enemy arms, they sued for peace.

One would think, or like to think, that such an act would rob a man of all his strength and his power to cope either with his own nature or outer circumstances. Yet Agathocles promptly turned to Sicilian affairs with all his old vigor and decision, the African interlude completely forgotten. It would seem, however, as though Africa might have left something that stirred deeply in him like a ferment of self-accusation, for in the most transparent way that such a nature could find to justify—could it be other than to himself?—the treachery of that day, he summoned up a righteous indignation against the soldiers who had killed his son and, claiming his father's right to seek vengeance, he ordered the systematic murder of all the Syracusan relatives of that valiant Greek army that had once followed him across the sea. "Not they," he cried, "but I —I have been wronged!" Thus his condemning finger that pointed against his own heart was stricken aside. This too, is all very Sicilian, or if you prefer, very Greek.

The long life of Agathocles of Syracuse had no quiet hours. Carthage had not been won, but he waged successful warfare on the mainland of Italy, found time to capture Corfu, to vanquish a Macedonian fleet, to marry the daughter of Ptolemy Soter, the Egyptian king, and wed his own daughter to Pyrrhos, King of

Epeiros, who was to come later to Sicily and almost win it back to Greece.

At seventy-two this tireless Agathocles began to plan another pleasantly grandiloquent conquest of Africa which would wipe clear the blot of his earlier failure but in the year 289 B.C., he was poisoned by a slave acting for his grandson whom he had refused to recognize as his heir. At the last he made a gesture true to his long life of paradox, for he played perfectly the rôle of affectionate husband and father, sending for his wife and youngest child that he might enact a proper death-bed scene. It is written that he was taken while still alive but impotent with the fatal drug, and laid on his funeral pyre. Syracuse seized his properties and banished his friends and mercenaries. Agathocles was dead and the great days of Sicilian unity as a Greek state were over for all time.

The guide-book will mention, as is its disturbing habit, the famous catacombs of Syracuse, other temples, the river Cyane where the Egyptian papyrus is found, a museum—in short a week's hard work in and about this pleasant, gay little city of cafés and a busy waterfront, of gardens and picturesque streets and medieval buildings and excellent hotels. The *duomo* with its rich baroque façade, is built between the columns of the temple of Athena and it is said that here had been continuous worship, Pagan, Mohammedan and Christian, for more than twenty-five hundred years. We know that the temple once contained those gold and ivory doors and the golden head of Medusa which, even in antique times, were considered priceless works of art,

and that from its roof shone the great shield of the goddess that mariners saw like the divine eye, watchful and guiding, glinting in the sun. Of course there is the Arathusa fountain of many legends and much poetry including Shelley's, which tell and retell in some form the gracious story of the nymph. More unique, I think, is the opportunity that Syracuse gives one to see at a single glance, from a corner of the wide *Piazza del Duomo,* the Doric columns of a fifth century temple, a gothic archway, the fine baroque façade of an eighteenth century palazzo, while all about one in the sunny streets moves the active life of this, our own day.

AKRAGAS

(*Agrigento*)

With Euryelos as a vantage point from which to look back over the not inconsiderable number of years that in some way seem to have grown less, as from a mountain top one sees below a village and thinks it would be quite easy to toss a stone into the main street, not only the five cities that comprised the ancient Syracuse become defined, but beyond them, southward, around Capo Passero and westward, Akragas is all but seen, and there is even a mind's glimpse of Gela, now only a waste coast land where the modern Terranova lies, and, nearly to Marsala and Selinus with its heap of columns, half buried in sand dunes. Even inland Segesta seems not quite hidden by the hills that enclose it. These, with Catania and Messina, and such smaller settlements as Himera and Taormina and Tin-

dari are all of the Greek island, the Greek state in Sicily of some few centuries B.C.

Akragas is popularly the Sicilian city of temples—Concordia, Juno, Hercules; those tawny golden columns set well apart from the modern town, raised on their own narrow ridge, the sea beyond them over a few miles of suave grain fields and the olive and almond orchards crowding close. Here in Sicily is what Greece should be, a Pagan Greece of bucolic festival, Pan and young maidens singing, sunlight and almond blossom, a cloudless sky and an azure ocean. It is a soft and sensual Greece, feminine, Ionian, almost Asiatic and eastern, like those sixth century figures of young women found only a few years ago near the Erechtheion, painted with blue and ochre and yellow, their hair dyed Titian red, jewelled and smiling, "like adorned women of the Orient, somewhat vulgar," but fascinating in what they suggest, by the implication in their enameled eyes. It was this element flowing out of the older lands of Assyria and Persia and Egypt, westward across the Ægean, that was to unite with the primitive and pure Doric, to create the "Greek miracle" that we know.

We sat through an August twilight and the harvested fields were parched by tropical heat to a desert of buff sand. The sea was no longer liquid and the sky was a back-drop, a flat, vertical curtain stretched smooth on which a few impossible stars began to show. The columns of the Concordia stood in an airless, timeless pause; massive, metallic, edged with a fine line of radiance, and across the interior violet shadows had been laid. Egypt. Isis. Aïda. It lacked only a tenor or a

jackal. There was no moon. Suddenly the night fell heavily, soundlessly, and the stars of silver dropped close but did not shine.

A golden Akragas, its wealth was fabulous, its joy of luxury a byword and its beauty fatal. Pindar called it the fairest city of men and Empedocles remarked that its people "built as if they were to live forever and feasted as if they were to die tomorrow." At the door of the house of Gellias (he was to throw himself and his treasures on a burning altar while the Carthaginians stormed the walls) slaves were stationed all day that they might invite every passing stranger to enter and take food and wine and rest. He entertained five hundred horsemen from neighboring Gela and gave them rich presents when they left. In his cellars, instead of casks and hogsheads, three hundred reservoirs were hewn from the rock, each holding nine hundred gallons of wine. In the gymnasium golden strigils and vessels were used. The women of Akragas erected costly tombs of marble for their song birds and a favorite horse was given the burial of a prince. When a certain Exainetos won the hundred-yard race at Olympia he was met on his return to Akragas by three hundred chariots drawn by white horses, and at a certain marriage, eight hundred carriages accompanied the bride to her new home. Banquets were given to entire quarters of the city, while to celebrate a trivial occasion tables with food and wine were placed at every poor man's door.

Akragas was founded by colonists from Gela and prospered under the tyrant Phalaris who threw his many enemies into a red-hot brazen bull, listening with pleas-

ure to their cries which came through the metallic monster's open mouth. He was succeeded by Theron who soon dominated both the home city, Gela, and Himera on the northern coast, built many of the temples and, if we can believe Pindar, ruled wisely and well. It was to this earlier Gela that Æschylus came when he was driven out of Athens, only to meet here his extraordinary death when an eagle (we are told) mistaking the bald head of the old man for a stone on which to crack the shell of a tortoise it was carrying high in the air, dropped the heavy prey with an unerring, with a truly eagle's eye.

Empedocles of Akragas has been mentioned; a Pythagorean, poet, physician, charlatan, who modestly described himself as "an immortal god, and no longer man, I wander among you, honored by all, adorned with priestly diadems and blooming wreaths." Although his dress of purple robes was of his own choosing and the permanent laurel crown was a headgear of his own placing, yet he was looked upon with reverence and even awe, and he taught a strangely modern doctrine, that of his great master, urging them to redeem their heavenly birthright which their sins had forfeited and telling them of the one supreme, invisible god. His last act was to hurl himself into the crater of Etna, thinking that his utter disappearance might gain for him final and complete divinity, but, say the ancients, the real gods were offended and threw back out of the burning mountain one of his bronze sandals so that men had proof of his act.

The Carthaginian armies at last hammered at the

walls of Akragas and, although the defenses had not been broken, these golden people fled in terrible panic, leaving the old and sick behind, leaving their houses and wealth and reservoirs of wine, and their tombs and temples to certain destruction. The men of Carthage entered and Akragas ceased to be.

Yet this is not quite the truth, for one goes there today to see the Concordia which has hardly an equal in the monuments that stand for us out of the Greek world. Its message is immediate, like a human voice singing in a happy melody and rhythm both gracious and exhilarating. It is so in accord with what we have always imagined of the people who built it, that these Akragentines seem to have achieved, as Empedocles suggested in derision, an endless life through this building that they raised. The Concordia withholds nothing of itself; rather it is as splendidly generous as those famous hosts of its city and with, perhaps, just a tinge of their admiration of the rich, the sheer golden, and their frank love of lavish display.

A few hundred yards beyond the Concordia are the fragments of the temple of Hercules, of which Cicero wrote, "There is a Temple of Hercules at Agrigentum, not far from the Forum, considered holy and greatly revered among the citizens. In it there is a bronze statue of Hercules himself, and I cannot easily tell where I have seen any finer; so greatly venerated among them, O Judges, that his mouth and his chin are a little worn away because men, in addressing their prayers and congratulations to him, are accustomed not only to worship the statue, but even to kiss it."

Still beyond, on this narrow length of land, is the cyclopean foundation of the temple of Zeus, the Olympieion, whose size, difficult as it is to appreciate buried in its ruins, is surpassed only by the temple of Diana at Ephesus. You will be told (guide and guide-book are such excellent sources of dimension of *stylobate*, notations of *cella* and *pronaos* and *opisthodomus in antis*, are they not?) that it is unique in form, for what reason escapes me, and that a man could have stood almost concealed in a single flute of the columns. You will be shown the prone, pieced-together Telamone, one of the gigantic caryatides, a clumsy Gulliver enclosed in Lilliputian strands of barbed wire. This grandly-planned temple was begun by prisoners who were Carthaginian captives from Himera, and the same people from Africa destroyed it before it was completed. We know that on its pediments, in what grand scale may be imagined, was wrought a Battle of Giants and a Destruction of Troy.

At the reconstructed corner of the temple of Castor and Pollux you will be shown bits of painted plaster that once covered the hewn stone. Immediately there is confusion, a pause, a question and a glance back at the Concordia. Something dire seems to have happened. These fragments conjure up a disturbing vision of what this admired temple must have been in the time of its erection, when a covering enveloped it like a smooth film on which primary colors were laid in intricate decoration and conventional design; in short what these temples looked like fresh from the minds and hands

that conceived and built them some four hundred years before Christ. Only in that passing moment, it might be said, were they truly Greek, wholly of the Greek day. How are we to contend with the realization that they were not meant to be softly mellow and golden and graciously worn by the sun and winds to the dull patina we talk so much about?

It is plain that the Greeks abhorred the crude porous material they were forced to quarry and, making the best of it, plastered it over with a marble whiteness on which they could paint and design at will. Not only temples, but their statues were painted, as Elie Faure writes—"Variegated in blues and reds, alive like men and women, the gods became animated at break of day, took part in the surprises and joys of the light and moved in the depth of the gathering shadow. The temples, covered with ochre, with vermilion, green, azure, and gold, are made up of the tones of the sky, of the space over the sea—greenish or flushed with purple, they have the colors of the sea; violet or blue, of the earth, of its dress of thin crops and dry foliage, with the milky olive trees and the black cypresses as they vary their forms to the ever present forms of the sinuous bays and the hills." For these Greeks were not lovers of the "romantic," the old, the vine-grown, in the manner of a Piranesi etching, the rustic and the ruined, but their whole being was intent on a perfection of definition and clean surfaces. Marble was their joy, hard and polished marble, like their sophisticated and finely-polished minds. These Greeks were splendidly alive, wholly "modern," with a sharp distrust for the

"old" and a vigorous confidence in themselves; in the immediate and the new. They were busy expressing their own vigor and proud strength, not sighing and timidly copying the worn yesterday. They had no cult of the "antique," they had no time nor desire to grub about excavating the past. If, by some miracle, they could come alive in this era, they would look about them, seize machines and electricity and engines, and build marvellously with steel and glass and flawless concrete, structures which would express the complex movement, the humming velocity of today. And this would be beautiful, because they would know, having discovered it in so many years B.C., something of the meaning of balance, rhythm, and the secret of form.

A few bits of red plaster seem to warn us not to mistake these Greeks, not to reconstruct them in the weak image engendered by our incapacity to cope actively with our own times, a sort of sickness which sends us like old women, sentimental and soft, to tip-toe religiously about a few columns propped amid a welter of fallen stones, by which hushed and fulsome admiration we show scorn of the twentieth century and our love of what we *think* is "Greek." When these people had become what the Concordia conveys to many minds, tutored by a Victorian master—or mistress!—they had long, long ceased to create temples or statues or any beauty at all.

Then walk a few paces from the Castor and Pollux to the altars, only recently uncovered, and again popular and nicely preconceived notions are crudely knocked on

the head. There is no agreement about these so-called archaic altars except that they are Greek, earlier than the temples, but how much earlier authority does not say. It is enough to see these sacrificial stone structures, barbaric, sanguinary, sinister, the paraphernalia of a religion whose dark rites were those of torture and blood, and whose mysteries were almost too shadowy, too horrible to contemplate. Standing beside the low, circular, wheel-like affair of massive cut stone, with its center ring from which there seems no escape, there comes over one a qualm of loathing and recoil, even of shuddering fear. One has been held by the felicity of Concordia and one has thought of the classical paganism that this temple symbolized, a faith that could have been no less free and fine, no less sun-drenched and airy than the monument raised to celebrate it. This circular altar is a plunge from exhilarating heights into some dark and imprisoning pit. No Greek hand, we protest, could have constructed this ominous wheel of sacrifice. No Greek mind could have borne the sheer brutal weight that this thing implies. The Greek was cruel, as few people have ever been, he tortured, he sacrificed —yes, but never in the dull crushing manner of the Stone Age, and only in such an age could this altar have been built.

Has the Concordia again deceived us? The same people built it who could throw seven thousand men of their own race and speech into a rock-bare pit, there to exist for seven years, hungering, thirsting, shivering, sun-scorched, disease-eaten, while at the edge they sat in their beautiful theater and listened to the play and

AT THE LEFT IS THE IMMENSE FALLEN STATUE IN THE TEMPLE OF ZEUS AT GIRGENTI. AT THE RIGHT ARE THE GOLDEN COLUMNS OF **THE TEMPLE OF CASTOR AND POLLUX.**

THE TEMPLE OF DIANA AT SEGESTA IS THE LEAST KNOWN, THE LEAST VISITED AND THE MOST REVEALING OF ALL THE GREEK RUINS

walked out for an evening's diversion to laugh at the ghastly torture they saw below. Beauty may be Truth, Truth, Beauty, but to suggest that beauty and cruelty, beauty and human sacrifice, could go companionably hand in hand, this is to range too far afield, however interesting that speculation might prove to be.

There seems to be no lack of agreement about Agrigento, the modern town. A personal impression ceases to be interesting when it becomes general. It is charitable to say that too much sulphur surrounds it, and to remind ourselves that these mines, not many years ago, were perhaps the nearest European outpost to Hell. The Saracens who captured Agrigento at the beginning of their invasion in 827, colonized it with Berbers who represented hardly a fortunate strain. Even today there lingers an old Sicilian proverb, "*Girgenti—mala gente.*"

But Akragas is aloof from sulphur and the dullness of a Corso. In the midst of smoke-grey olive and flowering almond trees, against an African sea and a southern sky, the Concordia is for all eyes to see and for all minds to understand as best they can.

EGESTA

(*Segesta*)

Egesta remains.

The theater of Syracuse, the Concordia of Agrigento and—the temple of Diana at Segesta, the least known, the least visited, the most revealing of them all.

Perhaps it was the potent fact of early May; some internal chemistry working in the mind and emotions whose reaction was fortunate; an expectancy, a keen desire, a morning of sun and striding well-being after a week of Palermo and city streets, but whatever it was that compelled the good English Cardinal Newman to write exclamatorily almost a hundred years ago, "Oh, wonderful sight! full of the most strange pleasure! It has been a day in my life to have seen Egesta!" finds ready agreement today. We jump the years, he and I, and standing together we are enthusiastic and blatant and boyish and care not who knows or objects to it. We will set exclamation point to tall adjective, extravagances to our calmer observations and throw caution, as it is customary to hurl it, to the four winds.

At the head of a great inland-reaching valley from the sea, no single standing stone to detract, only the stark lift of mountain cliff behind and the firm infolding flow of wheat lands down before, no one of its columns lacking, nor capitals gone, nor entablature broken, nor pediment destroyed, here in its superb setting is the Temple of Diana. To say it at once, simply and emphatically, it is the most revealing Greek temple in the world. It seemed as though this mountain and this valley were all a sanctuary dedicated to this single, vital object, as if every foot of it mounting ten miles upward from the sea, composed itself only to hold this ultimate climax, proudly, as only Sicilian mountains can be proud. It was guarded jealously and gladly, a symbol that it will always, one devoutly prays,

remain a tangible fragment of the Greek spirit, celebrating a faith that is neither pagan nor Christian, but beauty alone.

There is no emptiness within these forty columns; it is still a shrine. The Moloch-worshipping Carthaginians captured and transported to Africa the image it once sheltered and personified, only to be stricken with such awe and veneration that they held it sacred. The statue was restored by the Roman Scipio and the plunderer Verres hired barbarian workmen to seize it and carry it away, for no man of Egesta would enter the temple to touch it. "How great was the grief of the women! How great was the weeping of the old men! They anointed her with precious unguents and crowned her with flowers and with frankincense and burning perfumes they followed her to the borders of their territory." Cicero was writing of a material thing, a Diana of exquisitely wrought stone and metal that Verres could purloin. But something a Roman could not steal remained. The Greek mind saw in the structure itself the essence that the image hidden away inside epitomized only in a narrow manner. These temples were made to be seen, and to reveal. *They* were the religion and the god. They were the beauty that their gods and their civilization impelled them to create; manifestations of an inner faith of their hearts as they were of the outer art of their hands. No other work of man has ever been this sum and total of his abilities, his whole soul and his whole body for a brief moment in whole accord. The gods, their enemies might

plunder and load into an ox cart, but save the complete destruction of the temple, the real divinity always remained.

Pausing on the road to Segesta, one may look upward over converging fields and hills and miraculously, there it is. One may contain oneself, or leap, or cheer as nature dictates. The good Cardinal and I find ourselves in loud, shouting accord, and neither the dignity imposed on one by the Cloth or on the other by the Printed Page, will hold us to the dull ground-level of tempered praise.

Even the very despicable Egestians appeared amusing. Always allied to the common Greek enemy, Carthage, continually at the worst kind of double dealing, it was they, who, provoked by a petty dispute with Akragas, sent emissaries to Athens for aid, promising largely in men and money and thus providing the final pinch of powder that was needed to set off the Athenian bomb that had been made ready by the famous Alcibiades himself. When the representatives of Athens came to Sicily to assure themselves and their state of the good faith of Egesta, these people hurried to the shrine of Venus, at Eryx near Trapani, and begged the loan of the goddess's great store of gold plate, which they took back and displayed to the Athenians when they arrived, passing it secretly from house to house where the strangers were lavishly entertained, and even showing it in the temples. The men from Athens, dull enough dupes they must have been, returned home to report great wealth in Egesta and so the Athenian disaster began.

The city was partly destroyed in 409, but the survivors, again allying themselves with Carthage, persuaded Hamilco to defend it; yet only two years later Agathocles slaughtered ten thousand of its inhabitants and repeopled it with men of his own choosing. True to its tradition it turned Carthaginian once more only to slay treacherously its African garrison in the first Punic War. It welcomed the Romans, contrived a story of Trojan origin and told it with such audacious confidence that the city was not only spared, but granted the honor of Roman citizenship as well.

At Agrigento and Segesta there are these temples hardly equalled in Greece itself, and at Selinunte, well out of the usual path, there is what has been called "the very abomination of desolation" and by Henry Swinburn, who saw them as early as 1785, "one of the most gigantic and sublime ruins imaginable." A friend of mine found them "archeological rubbish." My own memory is of drifting sand, heat, palmetto scrub, heat, lizards, heat and silence except for the whispering wash of the sea against the dunes of the shore.

Here is the third largest Greek temple known (the first being the Diana of Ephesus and the second the Olympieion at Agrigento) a structure nearly two acres in area, the columns once standing over fifty feet high, each drum weighing about a hundred tons. At Selinus, so called from the wild parsley that grew in the river, Empedocles of Akragas again comes into our vision, for one of the smaller temples is thought to have been

dedicated to him after he had dug a canal at his own expense to drain malarial marshland that was dangerously close by. It was Hannibal who yoked the captive citizens to ropes, and, fastening ropes to columns, whipped these human cattle into action and pulled down Selinus stone by stone. Help from Syracuse arrived too late, but from the harbor they asked that mercy be shown the miserable people and the magnificent shrines, to which the great general from Africa replied that men not able to defend themselves deserved no better than slavery and, as the gods very apparently had deserted the temples, these were of no more use. Yet it was still a small city on its flat barren shore as late as the Saracen invasion a thousand years later, because these Moslems, impressed by the vast ruins, called it Rahl-el-Asnam, "Village of Idols," while the rough-and-ready Normans, for whom Greek ruins meant less than nothing we may be very sure, called it, with ample cause no doubt, Terra delle Pulci, or "Land of Fleas." Thus the full circle.

Selinunte is a perfect place to moralize grandly on the futility of Things, to quote the inevitable line of Omar, to sigh romantically over so much glory gone to golden dust. Ah, well—.

But there are half a hundred other temples in Sicily more or less recognizable as such, awaiting those visitors for whom a cracked capitol, a fragment of metope, a square foot of mosaic pavement are as giddying draughts of the strongest Sicilian wine. In the season these hardy, insatiable ones and all the others who must follow

where guide-books lead, swarm over the sacred debris. School teachers finding a respite from teaching ancient history in seeing it with their own eyes, eager young girls thinking no doubt of the handsome naughty Alcibiades, the two youths thinking about the girls, the pale chap with spectacles and high forehead who may be a tragic poet some day, the stern culture-tracking matron from Illinois, the lovers reading a Bohm translation in the shade, the impedimenta of guide books, camera tripods, paper bags of lunch, the indifferent children, the English of the official guide who alone is convinced that he is speaking the Anglo-Saxon tongue; yes, the little bearded man with a note book and rule and an archeological squint—all these will be there.

You cannot escape Greek ruins in Sicily. They jump out at you in the distressing shape of unshaven, unofficial *conduttore* who push you willy-nilly into doorways, and who seize you firmly by the arm to point out of smoky car windows. You ask where you can buy a glass of wine and are told where lies a bit of weathered marble. You are looking for a Norman courtyard and you are advised that under a certain baker's shop was once a temple to Apollo. The Sicilian Greeks, as one of them remarked, built for eternity and with a speed that was in proportion to the barbarians they captured and enslaved. Or did they lure to their island Amphion, the son of Zeus, who had built the walls of Thebes by charming the stones into place with the music of his lyre? Despite Roman and Arabic spoliation and the need

for material with which to build the later Norman castles and Spanish palaces, and the wear and tear of the sensible, often hobnailed shoes of the tourists, and earthquake and Time itself, walls and foundations and columns and cornices, temples that are quite obviously temples and temples that are plainly rubbish heaps miraculously remain. No one need leave empty-handed, particularly no one in accord with the little lady at Segesta, who cried so disappointedly, so poignantly, "My—but—it looks so new!"

To be sure there are other buildings in Sicily; churches and palaces and pigsties. There are remains of the Roman occupation, but with the exception of the unimpressive sunken amphitheatre at Syracuse and that unconvincing theater of Taormina whose situation is unrivalled for spectacular beauty in all of Europe, Rome left as little in Sicily as business-like despoilers are wont to leave behind them.

Under the Romans Sicily became a mere province in a vast empire, a full granary and a rich island ready for politicians to plunder. But by the year 500 of our era Rome itself was little more than a provincial city in the grandiose and impossible Byzantine state and Sicily was forgotten. Yet it was ready for another conqueror who would come over the same sea-route worn by the Carthaginians and who, strong, uncurbed sons of the Prophet that they were, would supply a sharp and memorable break between the ancient pagan world that was Greek and the struggling, new medieval and Christian

era. Temples were out of fashion and already crumbling and churches were the mode and very new.

During more than fourteen hundred years Greek Syracuse had been the center of Sicilian life and vitality, and its destruction in 878 marks not only the end of this long and vivid reign, but also the rapid emergence of a city of the opposite northern coast, all but unheard of until the Saracens established their capital there and made it a rival of the famous cities of the East. Palermo was never Greek. Originally Phœnician and later Carthaginian and afterwards Roman, only under these Moslems did it thrive. It was a prince of the truly superb name of Zidatullah Aghlab (unless someone had played a practical joke on an amateur historian) who arrived in Sicily in 827. Fifty years later Syracuse, the last Christian stronghold, had fallen and Arabic conquest of the island was complete.

What of these infidel invaders? Under them in Sicily as on the mainland, a new epoch was opened, decadence was halted, commerce and agriculture were stimulated, the arts—poetry and painting, science, philosophy and architecture and the minor handicrafts —were again practised. A love of beauty and a reverence for learning rode with these Arabs. They were, all in all, surprisingly tolerant of other races, even other religious creeds, and they administered their new possessions with wisdom and generosity. They were ambitious. Their religion extolled the sword, but, the sword sheathed, their culture praised beauty in many forms; more, far more important, their dark and infidel presence was an insulting threat at the very door of the

Church and enfeebled as that Christian house was by endless and futile discussion and divided authority, it roused and found new strength that it expended heroically in the great Crusades.

The Norman Island

V

THE story of the twelve stalwart sons of the impoverished Norman noble Tancred, of the house of d'Hauteville, and their kingdom in southern Italy and Sicily, is the most remarkable episode of the Middle Ages. It is all compounded of that savory blend of chivalry and personal ambition, of crusading and open marauding, of bravery and cold treachery that was present in the men themselves; those long-headed Normans, shrewd, practical, personally fearless, natural fighters for whom "arms and horses, the luxury of dress, the exercises of hunting and hawking" were high delights, although the same old writer says of them that, "in pressing occasions they could endure with incredible patience the inclemency of every climate and the toil and abstinence of military life."

About the year 1000 a handful of these careless, hard-living adventurers came to Italy as mercenaries to aid the Duke of Bari, whose forces, however, were defeated in the petty quarrel of the moment, throwing these northerners on the strange country to gain an uncertain livelihood as best they were able. Needless to say, they took care of themselves very well indeed, for within a few years under William, called "Bras-de-Fer," they had secured a rich state from which they refused to move even when a formidable alliance of

Henry III, Pope Leo IX and the Byzantine emperor, Constantine, sent an army of eviction against them. Under Humphrey, another of these prodigious brothers, this impressive force was routed and, not without causing embarrassment on the part of the victors, the Pope himself fell into their hands. This event perplexed them no little but it gave them, nevertheless, the opportunity to make advantageous alliances with the Church, to the end that Robert, who now had assumed leadership of the clan, was finally able to secure the imposing, if pleasantly indefinite, title of "Robert, by the Grace of God and St. Peter, Duke of Apulia and of Calabria and *future* Duke of Sicily by Their aid." Yet it was thanks to a still younger son of this inexhaustible family, Roger, called later the Great Count and the father of Roger, the first Sicilian king, that the island became theirs. This Count Roger appears to have possessed all of the attributes of the d'Hautevilles raised to a superlative degree. Saracen Sicily was the prize held out to him and, considering the circumstances, it seemed well beyond even his extensive and forceful grasp, yet it was not long before Roger struck, raiding the island with a small force, and returning a few months later with a larger army than his brother, the Duke of Apulia, had supplied. Messina was promptly captured, Enna in the far interior was stormed and Troina was taken. The invasion of Sicily had begun in earnest.

It is the difficult labor of necessity to condense this Sicilian conquest to a few paragraphs that will give the dull facts, when the entire episode is filled with the most romantic exploits that the age has given us; single-

handed combats, adventurous raids, battles against overwhelming odds—nothing is lacking, all of the Middle Ages is here, not excepting the enemy itself, who, being Saracen and Infidel, was a fit opponent for these very Christian knights.

It was only after ten years of constant fighting, however, that Palermo was taken with perilous encounters on the scaling ladders, at the gates, and within the city. The old historians have written that during the siege, a certain Moslem knight arrayed in black armor used to sit on his horse in one of the open, but well-defended gateways, until Roger's young nephew, angered at the calm insolence of this infidel, rode at him and killed him, but found himself within the city and the way of return barred by oak and iron. Spurring his horse he rode forward at great speed, killing and trampling, until he had crossed the entire city; then he escaped through another gate which was lightly defended.

We know that this Saracen city that the Norman brothers had captured was both populous and wealthy even before Syracuse had fallen into Mohammedan hands, for in the account of this last event by the monk Theodosius, who was taken as a prisoner and transported with others to Palermo, he calls it "the extremely famous and populous city of Palermo. The number of the citizens as compared with all accounts, had, in our opinion, not been overrated, for you would have thought that the whole race of Saracens had come together there, from the rising up of the sun even to its going down, from the north and from the sea, according to the accustomed speech of the most blessed

David." He writes in his long letter to the Pope that the city was a "blend of Sicilians, Greeks, Lombards and the Jews, Arabs and the Persians, Tartars, negroes, some wrapped in long robes and turbans, some clad in skins, and some half naked; faces oval, square or round, of every complexion and profile, beards and hair of every variety and cut. Wherefore the people being crowded together in such a press of inhabitants, began to build and inhabit houses without the walls, to such an extent that they really built many cities around the original one, not unequal to it."

A hundred years later, one Haqual, a travelling merchant from Bagdad, wrote that, "The mosques of the city and of the quarters around it outside of the walls, exceeded the number of three hundred," and he mentions the nine gates and the streets that were paved with stone from one end to the other. We know that its university was second only to that of Cordova and that poets were welcomed there and given ample praise and reward. There has come down through the years an exquisite *Kasida,* a descriptive poem written by Ibn Hamdês describing an evening of dissipation, beginning with their obtaining forbidden wine from an elderly nun who secretly let the revellers into the convent where it was stored, and proceeding to the hall, resplendent with carvings and metal work, vessels and vases from Tyre, silken hangings and "singing girls already touching the cords, this one caressing her lute, that one kissing her flute, while the dancer moves her feet in measure with the hand that beats the tambourine."

This was the city of the Normans. It was their prize.

Too wise to destroy it, they saw that only by its preservation could they retain its wealth and power; not only the material city but the human elements as well—these infidels, their shops and work rooms, their fine skill of hand and their sharp skill of mind. The less interruption the active, productive life of Saracen Sicily suffered, the less they, the new masters, would lose in prestige and actual wealth. They wanted no devastated, empty kingdom, these long-headed Normans. But there was another more intimate reason for carefully preserving what they had won; something about it pleased them, something of its oriental aspect and beautiful exotic customs and suave eastern way of life was balm to muscles that had long wielded a huge sword, and that was like respite and tranquil rest after a life of battle. It was not, however, until both Robert, Duke of Apulia, and the younger Count Roger had died that, on the succession of the second Roger not only to the Italian possessions but to Sicily where in 1130 he was crowned king, a truly regal court was established, a court that might well be the dream of a boy after reading the Thousand and One Nights.

A contemporary account of the coronation tells that "the floors of this palace glowed sumptuously all round with multicolored carpets, offering a suave pleasure to all who trod on them; palfreys with saddles and bridles of gold and wrought silver were led in the train; at the banquet no food nor drink was served in aught but cups of silver and gold, and there was not even a servant who was not clothed in silk."

Roger II was in all respects a great king; "Statura

grandis, facie leonina," prompt and confident in his decisions, superb in the vitality of his Norman body, beloved and feared by his soldiers, "accomplishing more asleep than most men waking," a chronicle says; a patron of the arts and the sciences, particularly geography, devoting years to the compilation of his "Book of Roger, or the Delight of Whoso Loves to Make a Circuit of the Word." A shrewd judge of men, Christian and Infidel alike, in a priest-ridden age of cramping church doctrine, he went his own way unbigoted, tolerant, creating a Syrian Greek, George Antiochenus, his Emir of Emirs, and choosing Edrise, a Moslem of the princely house of Beni Hammud, for his close advisor, his teacher and friend.

King Roger II of Sicily was succeeded by a son, William I, called The Bad, who in appearance was a Norman, tall and handsome, rashly brave; yet he was irresolute, vicious and luxury loving, leaving more and more the affairs of state to his capable queen, Margaret of Navarre. William I was what a second northern generation raised in the Arabic splendor of Palermo might well become, an Arab emir, with his harem and his eunuchs. The old battles in single combat, the hearty marauding, hunting and hawking has now been exchanged for a divan of silk, soft music, and fawning courtiers in his garden-palace of La Zisa outside of the Walls. The Moslems mourned his death and the native women, clothed in sackcloth, lamented through the streets chanting wild funeral songs.

But the blood of Tancred had not run itself out, for in the son, William II, the Good, a blend was estab-

Built by the Normans

lished and in the person of this youthful ruler, the last of that great house, something that might rightly be called Arabo-Norman was evolved. His mother, Margaret, ruled in his youth as regent with the aid of her strange triumvirate of ministers, an English churchman, Richard Palmer, an Italian, Matteo d'Ajello and Caid Peter, an Arabic eunuch. It was after William became king in his own right that another Englishman, Walter of the Mill, was made his Archbishop and councilor.

Although the quotation is long, the personality of this king and the description of his court and city as seen and written down by another Moslem traveller, Abn Husayn ibn Jubar, is too illuminating not to be included. This Arab visited Sicily in 1184. He writes under the title, "Description of the Capital of Sicily—may Allah give it back to the Moslems!"

"It is the metropolis of these regions: it combines in one two prizes, prosperity and magnificence. Here you will find everything you desire, be it good or fair, mature or green. Ancient and elegant, splendid and passing fair, she rises before you like an enchantress, enthroned among her open spaces and her plains that are like unto one garden. With spacious alleys and main thoroughfares, she dazzled the eyes with the rare loveliness of her aspect. A stupendous city like Cordova in her architecture, her buildings are all cut stone, a clear river divides her in two and four springs well up alongside. The King found in her every pleasure of the earth and therefore made her the capital of his Frankish realm—may Allah exterminate them! The pleasure palaces of the King encircle the city as a necklace clasps

the throat of a maiden with well-filled bosom, so that the prince without ever going outside these lovely palaces and pleasure grounds, can pass from one to the other of the gardens and open courts of Palermo. What delights he has there—may God prevent him from enjoying them! What halls and palaces and loggie and belvederes! And how many monasteries belong to him which he has adorned with buildings and endowed with large estates! For how many churches has he not had crosses cast in gold and in silver! But it lies in the power of Allah to make fortune ere long return benign to this island. He can give it back to the true Faith and rescue it by His grace and power, from danger to safety: for he is Almighty!

"The King of Sicily is remarkable for his good conduct and because he makes so much use of the Moslems, and employs as courtiers eunuchs, who mostly keep their faith a secret, yet are firm in the laws of Islam. The king puts much faith in the Moslems and entrusts his affairs to them, even those of great moment; thus, for instance, the head of his kitchen is a Moslem, and he keeps a bodyguard of Mohammedan slaves with a captain of that race. His Vizier and his chamberlains are always chosen from among these eunuchs; he has a large number of them, and they are the employees in the public affairs and in the court. In their persons one sees the splendor of this kingdom; they wear sumptuous clothes and have agile horses, and none of them are without a following of familiars and clients.

"This King possesses magnificent palaces and delectable gardens, especially in the aforesaid capital of the

kingdom. In Messina he has a palace as white as a dove, which dominates the beach; here many courtiers and handmaidens await upon the King. In truth, no Christian king is more luxurious, nor lives more delightfully and well.

"He resembles Moslem kings in the habit of living sunk in the pleasures of kingship, also in the ordering of the administration, in manners and customs, in the gradation of his optimates, the magnificence of his court and the display of pomp. Great is his realm. He has doctors and astrologers whom he honors greatly, finding so much pleasure in intercourse with them, that when he hears of any of these learned men travelling in his domain, he has them retained and brought to him and gives them large sums to make them forget their country—may God in His grace keep every Moslem from this temptation! King William is thirty years of age, or thereabouts. May God prolong his life and give him health—for the well-being of the Moslems!

"The handmaidens and concubines that he keeps in his palace are all Moslems. Indeed, the same man by name Yahya, one of the attendants of the *tiraz*, who embroider in gold the garments of the King, told us another not less marvellous fact, namely, that the Christian women of Frankish race living in the palace became Mohammedans, converted by the handmaidens we mentioned. The King knows nothing of it. These women are very zealous in good works.

"The courtiers who live in the kingdom, the great ones of the state, and the officers of the government are Mohammedans and without any exception they fast at

the proper times, personally or by proxy; they dispense alms to gain the favor of God, ransom prisoners, educate and give away in marriage Mohammedan children; all do these good works according to their means. All this by the grace of Allah—may He be exalted and praised!"

The extraordinary circumstances that made possible this man and his rule and his domain, caused to be built an equivalent in stone—those Christian churches of Palermo which were the florescence of the Arabo-Norman culture. Three of these are in Palermo itself; the Cathedral built by the Englishman, Walter of the Mill, the so-called Martorana, built by King Roger's Greek admiral, George of Antioch, the royal chapel in Roger's own palace, and the fourth is the great cathedral-monastery of William the Good at Monreale, overlooking from the near hills the whole "Golden Shell" from Monte Pellegrino to Monte Zafferane, within which the city, the Roman Panormous, "All harbor" and the Mohammedan Balerm, lies between its rich orchards and its sea. A fifth, a church which Count Roger, William's grandfather raised in conformity with a vow, is at the little sea coast town of Cefalu, an hour away by train towards Messina. Of these, it is the church and its cloister and garden at Monreale and the diminutive royal chapel at Palermo, that show both the exquisite Arabic detail and the superb Byzantine mosaics in a fine and impressive form.

Already the difficulties of speaking historically about these Sicilian mosaics have been met, but not overcome, by using the compound term Arabo-Norman-Byzantine,

which conveys little but does seem to indicate the paradox and the confused elements which enter. Byzantine art is the bridge which spans the transition of the classical era of pagan Greece to the Christian Renaissance; a far from secure structure, at times hardly serviceable at all, but counting as a part of it these mosaics of San Sofia, of Ravenna, of Venice and of Palermo, that hold in their form and color, at least a faint hint of supreme Greece as they do of the older Egypt and Babylon that Byzantium had fallen heir to, but only after the ultimate sickness had weakened each one of them in turn and the end was near. From a Greek frieze, colored as we know they often were, we can pause a moment in front of these saints and prophets of Monreale and then pass on to the frescos of Giotto and the height of the Renaissance. It is because they allow us so to pass, whatever may be their comparative worth, that we give these latest mosaics at Palermo their place in the procession of the great arts. The supreme exterior forms had been born and had died with the temples, never to return until the building of the Gothic cathedrals of the north, yet an inner, oriental luxury of color and gold, and materials and jewels was created at Constantinople. Here in Sicily, in the year 1176, when Byzantium itself was tottering and the Middle Ages were at last drawing to a close, there was a moment of revival with no fear of the earlier eastern splendor, of a regal and golden richness that would be a Christian pæan of praise to both a God and a king.

The man who ordered this structure was a handsome young Norman still in the first exuberant flush of power

and kingship and enjoying his high rank and his gifts as obviously as a child who throws a new ball into the air. A Norman born into a western corner of Araby, a Christian who delighted in the refinement of infidel culture, he ordered for his new church regal gold and sheets of marble and porphyry, and the deft Saracens, his servant-craftsmen, and the Calogeri, incomparable Greek masters of mosaic, were given more than a free hand; they were given, it is so plain, young William's own enthusiasm, his own health and lavish joy. His very appearance inspired them, this twenty-year-old king of whom the historian Falcundus wrote that, so radiantly handsome he was and in his features was so much imperial grace, the boy was loved forthwith. Another old chronicler avers that William was the flower of kings, the crown of princes, the mirror of his citizens, the hope and trust of his friends.

The great interior of Monreale is a revelation. Around the high, golden wall of the cathedral, above the arcade carried on granite columns brought from a pagan temple, is the unbroken sweep of mosaics that picture the Christian faith from the creation to the passion. From the apse itself, looks out the colossal half-length Christ, a Byzantine Christ of mature power and authority, his right hand raised in blessing that is also warning. Below, the Virgin is enthroned and on either side stand the angels and archangels and prophets. The corners of the choir, the transepts and aisles, hold the pictured story of earthly scene and heavenly revelation, of prophecy and fulfilment and triumph. Here seems an art at its full prime. It is unbelievable that

a recent book on Sicily can say of them, ". . . the figures become stilted, the drawing defective and the composition unreal." *Per Dio e Bacchus!* We are given all the heavy, ripe fruit of the Byzantine renaissance and we are bade measure it by the dead photographic reality of today!

It is not the exterior of the cathedral at Monreale, however decorative and satisfying may be the shafting and the interlaced arching and lava inlay of the apse, or the fine bronze doors of Bonanno of Pisa and Barisano of Trani, nor is it the interior architecture, but the mosaics that give this church almost a unique place in Western Europe. It seems less a church one steps into than a coronation hall. The shuffling about of the beetle-black priests, the lugubrious droning of the offices, the timid old women on their knees, have no place here, they are all dwarfed and trivial and incongruously absurd.

At the side of the church are the cloisters, without doubt the most thoroughly sketched and photographed and painted, the most oh-ed and ah-ed spot in Sicily. Everyone immediately likes them, they are so pretty; and all those who think the mosaics crude and unrealistic are enchanted. A guide you cannot escape will tell you the exact number of the lovely arabic double columns, bid you notice that no two of the capitals are alike in their fantastic carving and all but force you to squint professionally in admiration of their exact mechanical alignment. In a corner there is a fountain of Moorish grace, and on beyond through the roofless walls of William's own palace there is a

tropical garden of palms and deeply shading banana trees and beds of luxurious flowers. All of Palermo and the fertile half circle of orange and lemon orchards lie under the low balustrade. Behind are high bare hills that ring this *Concho d'Oro* making it a green and sheltered garden within protecting walls.

Built within his Palermo palace by the first King Roger, son of the Great Count, the *Capella Reale* has been called, perhaps too enthusiastically, "the most beautiful ecclesiastical interior in Christendom." But if by beautiful is meant the exquisite and intimate charm of a rare casket of rich detail, worked by delicate hands, embossed and jeweled and painted, every part of it, then this royal chapel is superlatively fine. Certainly it has no possible duplicate outside of the east. Here again all sense of its being a church and a place of Christian worship is lost as one steps into the soft and gleaming interior. Here is a thing out of Bagdad. There are the same mosaics worked by the same Greek hands, but now they are used in a restricted space and the lighting is subtle, not free as at Monreale, and the effect becomes almost theatric until the intricate harmony of part to part, suave walls of creamy grey-veined Parian marble, dark granite, cipollino, red porphyry, and serpentine, the lustrous gold and vermilion and blue of the mosaics and, above, the Persian-Moorish ceiling of deep honeycomb work elaborately painted with stars and grotesques and lettered in Arabic, are all blended into the prevailing tone of eastern beauty.

This was created for a king wholly Norman, what-

ever his grandson of Monreale might be said to have been. Yet a man, who the ecclesiastics of the day, having cause to distrust him, averred was more Mohammedan than Christian; a man a little tired of long sieges and combat and hard living, a man for whom ease was strange and the lave of tranquillity welcome and new. At the end of the narrow nave paved with marble and porphyry, facing the domed apse with its raised altar guarded by a rail of pierced marble, is the platform of the spreading royal throne. Roger sat here in his court dress of a Byzantine emperor, overlaid with Persian embroidery, with his Arabic advisors and teachers about him. Catching the light from the high windows were the mosaics that were known as Roger's Bible, and facing him was that same portrayal of a commanding, a Greek Christ. He was a medieval king and cruel, yet he was a great warrior and an astute statesman. He filled his coffers by purely Norman means and spent lavishly in encouraging learning and creating beauty. The monk Theophanus Kerameous preached to him, the same cleric who wrote of the ceiling of the capella "that it seemed like a sky at night when the host of stars twinkled down through the clear air" and of the "sacred pavement like a meadow in spring, adorned with marbles as with flowers, only flowers fade and this meadow is imperishable." During the sermon perhaps an infidel councillor whispered words in Arabic in the royal ear, or a eunuch stood guard at the door.

The flowering of this art in Sicilian Palermo was only a brief phenomenon and in a few decades it was

gone, but for the moment of its living it created a few things that were strangely beautiful, and doubtless for any art that is enough to say.

There is in Palermo, almost within sight of the Palazzo Reale, the miniature cloister garden of the red-domed San Giovanni degli Eramiti, and there is William's palace of La Cuba with its Arabic inscription. "In the name of God, clement, merciful, pay attention. Here halt and admire for you will see the illustrious dwelling of the most illustrious of the Kings of the Earth, William II." There is a similar pleasure house of that king's father, La Zisa, with a Moorish fountain that flows down a marble runnel, there is the grim fourteenth century Palazzo Chiaramonte, the most interesting in Palermo, with the ceiling of the great hall beamed and painted with scenes of the day, and, of course, there is the museum. But old churches and Norman palazzos and castellos are, like the stones of an earlier antiquity, profusely scattered over the island; many an old sunlit *cortile*, a hundred delightful, shafted windows, bits of old carving, the holding felicity of a stairway or balcony.

I have not forgotten that in Taormina, with its famous Greek theatre which, as we see it now, is entirely Roman, there is the Palazzo Corvaia, because remembering it, I can recount what no one of the half dozen waiting guides to this medieval building will tell (and I have it from F. Marion Crawford's interesting book) namely, the diverting story of old Bernardo Cabrera, Count of Modica, who in the year

Saracen Towers of Palermo

1412 was Grand Justiciary of the kingdom of Sicily and a very powerful noble indeed.

It happened that at this time the young and beautiful widow of King Martin of Sicily, Blanche of Navarre, ruled the island as vicar and lieutenant. There were half a dozen possible claimants to the vacant throne and among them Bernardo who, although he could own to no royal blood in his veins, for all that lack had strong regal aspirations and, more, an old man's mad and insatiable passion for the young queen. In this Palazzo Corvaia a Sicilian parliament was held to meet the increasing confusion that the far too many candidates were causing and, attending it, the count of Modica was able to oppose all reasonable measures that were suggested. Calling on friendly barons and dependents of lesser rank, he boldly announced and defended his right as Grand Justiciary to rule, swore that he did not mean to oppose the queen, but only to hold the kingdom in safety for the House of Aragon. In this way or that he won over the captain of the queen's troops and then, seeking an interview, appeared before her at her castle in Catania.

Queen Blanche finally agreed to speak with the count, but only from the safety of the high poop of a galley while he stood below on the shore. Immediately, for he was a man of action, if not of reserve and caution, Bernardo proclaimed his mad infatuation, implored her hand, threatened and cried out his love in turn. She laughed and then turned away in scorn, crying, as the Jesuit historian tells, "O, you vile old man!" She then commanded the owner of the galley to put to sea and

to sail to Syracuse. But the old fellow whom a heady mixture of love and ambition and egotism made uncontrollable, made even young and impetuously dashing once more, pursued his fair lady by land and confronted her in her castle of the Marsetto. It was not all grotesque, senile play, for he brought up his vessels and his men in a business-like fashion and with no more ado began to batter the walls with his siege engines until, unsuccessful in his assault and "writhing in impotent rage," it is written, "he fell to pelting the solid masonry walls with mud and garbage."

The hero of this delightful bit of Sicilian history seems to have been one Torres, the owner of the galley, for, having just carried Blanche from Catania, he and his friends again arrived at night and fell on Bernardo who was obliged to fight for his life ignominiously in shirt and nightcap, and during the fray the queen was taken on board the ship which set sail for Palermo.

Bernardo promptly followed around the southern coast of the island, collected a small army and marched secretly to Palermo. But the queen was warned when Bernardo was at the very gates of the Palazzo Chiaramonte where she stayed, and with her attending women she was forced to flee out of the postern to the nearby shore where the galley of our hero Torres was moored. The women were in their night clothes. They called for help but it was late and no answer came from the ship. They waded out into the water—it was January, the old chronicle says—and finally Torres awoke and Blanche was again taken on board and sail was set for Solunto up the coast.

Once more this persistent old nobleman followed and laid siege to his lady's person and heart, but a raiding party from her castle happened to capture him and he was confined in Motta Santa Anastasia, securely locked in a disused cistern. When it began to rain, his captors turned the water in upon him and while he pled and swore and promised to be good, the water rose from his ankles to his knees, to his ample waist, to his shoulders even, before they shut off the supply and hauled him out only to put him in a turret. There he was allowed to arrange for his escape at night by means of a rope from his high window, but a net was spread below him and the old fellow was caught in it. For many days he hung suspended between earth and sky, while all the men and women from the loyal countryside came to laugh at him and mock him; perhaps the Queen Blanche herself stood below and smiled. Tiring of this sport they took him back into his prison until the election of King Frederick gave him freedom, and to our loss, nothing more of Bernardo is told.

It is a very pleasant road to ruins, this that goes by the way of men, their warm and human acts and thoughts; Dionysius working with his thousands of laborers at the great wall of Syracuse or taking the golden gown from the statue of Jove at the Olympieion because, as he remarked, "it was too warm in summer and too cold in winter, while wool was suitable in all seasons"; or an Athenian captive reciting Euripides in the crowded theatre of Hiero; Gellias of Akragas and his wine vats and his funeral pyre; Empedocles and his laurel crown; Agathocles; the citizens of Egesta rush-

ing the gold plate of Venus from house to house; Archimedes killed by a Roman on the beach at Syracuse as he studied geometrical figures he had drawn in the sand; the young d'Hauteville scion riding impetuously at the inner gate of infidel Palermo; our old friend Bernardo and his swinging cage. Many others we have forgotten. Then too, there must be an ending. Can nothing be written of such a very lovely Greek lady as was Phistis or the Syrian slave and magician of Enna who, self-proclaimed as King Antiochus, led his fantastic forces in the first slave war? But after all there is another Sicily, a living Sicily, more immediate and vivid and no less varied. Perhaps we have looked long enough at a temple and a tomb.

Enna

VI

ONCE in this mountain town of Enna, whose history is so rich with striking episodes, there was the mother-goddess Ceres with the child Persephone in her arms; a woman strong limbed, deep bosomed, mature, a goddess yet a divinity of earth, of earth's fruition, a symbol of that other older conception, mystical and elemental—seed into flower into fruit. Hers was the pure body, vast and unfailing, and hers the calm beauty of things at full prime. She was no pale and sorrowing woman. She was warm and lusty and pregnant with life. She was man's daily bread and his bodily strength and full-bellied laughter. Persephone, the child, was flower, was returning spring and young loveliness and men saw this daughter in the welcome first greening of their grain.

At Enna was the great temple of Ceres and her sacred shrine, and we know of it as Cicero himself saw it when he went there to collect evidence against Verres.

"It is an old custom, O Judges, which can be proved from the most ancient records and monuments of the Greeks, that the whole island of Sicily was consecrated to Ceres and Persephone. Not only did all other nations think so, but the Sicilians were themselves so convinced of it that it appeared a deeply-rooted and innate

belief in their minds. For they believe that these goddesses were born in these districts, and that corn was first discovered in this land, and that Persephone was carried off from a grove in the territory of Enna, a place which, because it is situated in the center of the island, is called the navel of Sicily, and when Ceres wished to see her and trace her out, she is said to have lit her torches from those flames which burst out from the summit of Etna, and, carrying these torches before her, to have wandered over the whole earth. But Enna . . . is on a high and lofty situation, on the top of which is a large level plain and springs of water which are never dry, and the whole of the plain is cut off and separated, so as to be difficult of approach. Around it are many lakes and groves and beautiful flowers at every season of the year, so that the place itself seems to testify to that abduction of the virgin which we have heard of from boyhood. Near it is a cave turned towards the north, of unfathomable depth, where they say that father Pluto suddenly rose out of the earth in his chariot and carried off the virgin from that spot, and that on a sudden, at no great distance from Syracuse, he went beneath the earth and that immediately a lake sprang up in that place, and there to this day Syracusans celebrate anniversary festivals with the most numerous assemblages of both sexes.

"For thought of that temple, that place, of that holy religion came into my mind. Everything seemed present before my eyes, the day on which, when I arrived at Enna, the priests of Ceres came to meet me with garlands of vervain and with fillets; the concourse of citi-

zens, among whom, while I was addressing them, there was such a weeping and a groaning that the most bitter grief seemed to have taken possession of the whole. They did not complain of the absolute way in which the tenths were levied, nor of the plunder of property, nor the iniquity of tribunals, nor of that man's unhallowed lusts, nor of his violences, nor of the insults by which they had been oppressed and overwhelmed. It was the divinity of Ceres, the antiquity of their sacred observances, the holy veneration due to their temple, which they wished should have atonement made to them by the punishment of that most atrocious and audacious man. They said that they could excuse anything else; that to everything else they were indifferent. This indignation of theirs was so great that you might suppose that Verres, like another king of hell, had come to Enna, and had carried off, not Persephone but Ceres herself. And in truth, that city does not appear to be a city, but a shrine of Ceres. The people of Enna think that Ceres dwells among them, so that they appear to be not citizens of that city, but all ministers and officers of that goddess."

From the flat table of rock where the great temple once stood, one can see a few miles in the distance, the bit of water called Pergusa that Ovid describes:

"There stands a broad lake near to Enna's walls,
Men call it Pergus—not Cayster's wave
More musical with song of frequent swans.
The veiling woods o'erhang its face, and ward
The fires of baffled Phœbus. From the grove

Breathes coolness:—from the turf a thousand flowers
Blush with the hues of Tyre. Perpetual spring
The spot invests. Beneath the happy shade
Proserpina was sporting:—now she culled

"The violet's purple, now the lilies' snow,
And still her baskets heaped, and girl-like filled
Her bosom with the fragrant spoil, and mocked
Her mates who gathered less. Ah! love is swift!
To see—to burn—to bear her thence—for this
Was but a moment's work. The frightened maid
Shrieking, upon her mother and her mates
For succor called—her mother most. Her robe
Was rent, and on the earth her treasured flowers
Were scattered, and her child-like innocence
Even for that loss, even in that hour, was fain to grieve."

What can be said of these places by a traveller of today?

A city three thousand feet above the sea looks far in every direction over the rolling mountains of inland Sicily, over I do not know how many square miles of grain fields; over a treeless and flowing land to other distant towns high on their own hills, lifting like islands above the spreading green undulation of this sea—thus is Enna. It dominates an impressive sweep of Sicily, almost all Sicily, and it seems a land grown vast, of mountains succeeding mountains under a sky of piling clouds, and of space extending abundantly into sheer space. There is freedom from all clutter. There is a broad and restful generosity. One thinks vaguely of higher mountains always beyond, of prairies even, of truly vast lands. Yet there is no desolation. With the

warm May sun over it all, there is growth and fecundity and amplitude. It is the home land of Ceres formed in the same heroic mould that shaped the swelling adequacy of her own body. Here life must be calm and purposeful, one thinks almost un-Sicilian; austere but not starved or narrowed, peaceful but not timid. The men who plow and plant and harvest these huge fields need to be strong and confident men, patient, forever toiling, yet proud to be so implanted in this earth, proud of being fit to cope with it and grateful for its sure yield. Looking up they must always see the hill of Enna that is like a temple, although nothing of hewn Doric columns remains, and perhaps, Christians though they are, something of an earlier worship comes back as they start again to follow behind the slow plow.

Through all the grain lands of Europe the older folk customs of harvest are in some measure still observed, and in these the elemental legend of Ceres seems to repeat itself again and again. Perhaps it is the peasant who says, when the wheat waves in the wind, "The wheat mother is running over the field," or the puppet that is made of the last sheaf harvested and which, dressed in female clothing, is called the Old Woman and is taken in procession around the village, or hung in the barn to keep off the mice, or a wisp of it laid in the manger of cattle to assure them protection and growth. The grain from this special sheaf is sometimes scattered through the fields at the next sowing, or a bundle is made double or treble the usual size and saved during the winter to insure a large yield in the season to come, or a wreath is made of this straw and

a young girl, crowned by it, is taken with music and singing like a true Persephone through the village.

I have read that as late in our Christian era as the beginning of the nineteenth century, an English traveller at Eleusis, where the great Mysteries were performed in Homeric times, saw the statue of Demeter in her ruined temple that had become a threshing floor. When this image was taken away to some museum the sorrow of the people of Eleusis was not unlike that of the Greek people of Enna, so much they still revered it as a bringer of good harvests to their wide fields.

The Sicilian harvest of grain and the harvest of the grapes, *Mietitura and Vendemmia*, the one in midsummer, the other in early fall—these are the two labors that are closest to the mind and heart of Sicily. In this inland country, wheat is nearly the only crop, and in many of the long coastal strips the vine terraces are continuous from sea to hill top. There is not a child and, it may be also, not an animal, that does not sense in these two seasons of harvest their vital significance.

The *Mietitura* in the grain land of Ceres, marks the turn of the year, the climax. The grain has been traditionally sown in November between the first, the day of all the saints, and the last, which is dedicated to Saint Andrea, the Apostle. Often the seed is blessed in October when a handful from each property is brought into the village church, to be mixed thoroughly and the blessing transmitted, kernel by kernel, through the whole supply. Before dawn the men are at the field, a bit of fire kindled and the garlic roasted, which, with

bread, is their first food of the day. The ritual of the first sowing, once closely observed, has not entirely died out. Social customs are transmitted from generation to generation and methods of cultivation are taught by father to son and these observances, like the songs and dances, reach back far into the past. A rigid code says, in effect, that the word and the teachings of a father, and through him the impressive voice of grandfather and great-grandfather and on into the dim past, is unalterable law, to be obeyed without question, to be followed without deviation. The stern sense of family loyalty, of family pride, constitutes here, in Sicily, another religion parallel to the Church that equally imposes the implicit reverence for the past that holds a man and a people firmly in an archaic day. The lives of these inland mountain Sicilians are primitive in the true meaning of the word. It would be hard to find many points of difference in the ritual of grain planting and harvesting from the time when it was not to God and the Saints men prayed, but to Ceres herself. Nor have the people themselves changed, so close they are to the unchanging earth, so much is their simple life a part of the elemental simplicity of generation and growth and decay.

The men who will sow and the men with the oxen for plowing are ready before the first light comes over the hills. The food is eaten, they wait, and with the first show of day they bow in prayer. The oxen are turned for the long furrow that will divide the field into equal narrow strips, one for each sower, and then, touching the animals with his goad, the driver cries "In

the name of God, go on!" Thus in His name both men and beasts labor at putting in the seed.

This November sowing is a far more somber labor than the harvesting. The nights are cold in the inland hills and the men go back to sleep under cover in one of the out-buildings at the farmstead of the proprietor. A fire is kindled. After supper prayers are chanted in unison. There is no music and even the poems are recited now, not sung. There is little bantering and less drinking. The long recitations are listened to in silence. The tone is autumnal, there is no leaven of women and children, and the men sit in shawls wrapped against the cold.

But the *Mietitura*, the actual harvest, is golden fruition in the hot, livening sun of Sicilian July. Not many years ago the laborers went out to the reaping with traditional harvest music of cymbals and pipes and tambourines and the townspeople who did not accompany them gathered in the piazza to watch while they paused to dance for a moment on the way. As always, the work began at first dawn and the eight men under a *caporale*, who constituted each "crew" or *opera*, and of which there might be several, spread themselves out with the wind at their backs, so that the grain would bend a little away from them and be the easier cut and gathered, and the hand-reaping began; bodies bent double, feet spread, the stalks, which were cut close to the earth, held in the left hand, then twisted into small bundles and left for the *caporale* who bound six of these handfuls into a sheaf and six sheafs into a load for a mule.

It is the threshing floor that is the center of the

harvest, as is the treading vat at the gathering of the grapes. Around this central space of flat, hard-packed, sun-baked earth which, if stone can be had, is carefully paved with closely-set blocks, the grain is piled, and to it come the reapers at noon and at night and they sleep in rude shelters pitched near by. It is a camp, a temporary settlement, a place of sweltering labor by day and a stage for dancing, singing and sports when, in the cool of the evening, it has been cleared for the night. The threshing is done by mules driven in pairs over the grain spread deep on the floor. It is a long, hard labor, this primitive breaking of grain, but it is eased by the singing that in Sicily the rhythm of all bodily movement impels.

After an hour of the threshing, the driver calls encouragement to his lagging animals. In dialect it goes—

Ed arreggiti, gran mula,
ca t'hê dari 'na bona nava.
—E chi nova è chista?
—Vai a lu ventu e t'arrifrisca.
Tu va' a lu ventu,
eu a lu turmentu:
sia lodatu lu santu Sagramentu!

Bear up, great mules,
here's good news for you.
—And what news is this?
—Go into the wind and refresh yourselves.
You go into the wind,
and I go into torment:
may the blessed Sacrament be praised!

Then the *Turnanti* come into the *aia,* the men who turn over the grain with two pronged wooden forks, shaking it to loosen any kernels that may be freed, and when they have finished, again the pair of mules are driven on and the driver cracks his whip and sings out his directions to them—

Now go on this side,
for there is the sacred angel!
Go on ahead
for there is the angel awaiting you
and in the middle
for there is San Vincenzu!

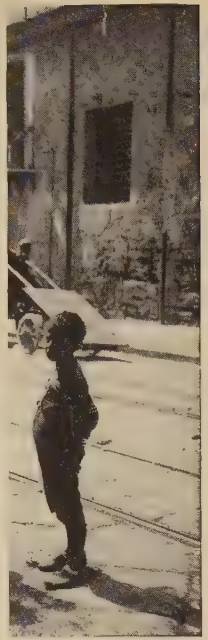
Or more poetically he will urge his beasts, confined to the narrow circle of the threshing floor—

Giria e vota
comu 'na bedda Greca batiota!
vota e giria
comu 'na Greca dintra la batia!

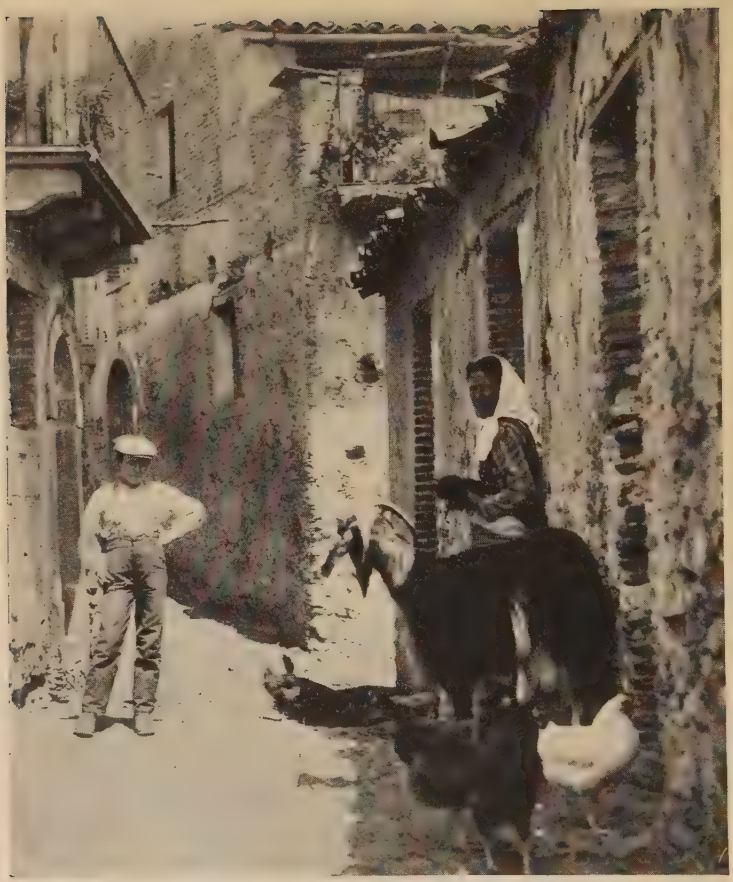
Round and round
like a beautiful Greek nun!
Round and round
like a nun in a convent!

And with that love of the extravagant and the ornate the Sicilian gives constant voice to, he calls them—"O valiant one! O great bay mule! O shining eyes! Go happily with contented hearts!"

At the end of the long day, when to the high airy place where these threshing floors are always placed to aid in the winnowing, the reapers are coming back in



THOUGH SICILY IS CHANGING, MANY STURDY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OLD ORDER STILL REMAIN. THAT THE SICILIAN IS NO BELIEVER IN RACE SUICIDE IS OBVIOUS FROM THE NUMBER OF YOUNGSTERS EVERYWHERE.



IN THE ORDINARY SICILIAN TOWN GOATS ARE NEARLY AS UBIQUITOUS AS HUMAN BEINGS. GOATS ARE SICILY'S MILK SUPPLY AND GOATHERDS DRIVE THEIR FLOCKS THROUGH THE STREETS, MILKING THE ANIMALS INTO BOTTLES BEFORE EACH HOUSEWIFE'S DOOR.

single file from the lower slopes, and the last *caccia*, or hour's treading, has been finished, the driver lifts his voice in a last song of day's labor done.

> Saint Lorenzo!
> Saint Vincenzo!
> The straw is made and the mules are
> in the middle.
> Saint Simone!
> Bring water and vinegar and a wisp of straw.
> Saint Pricopu!
> Up mules, . . . down, . . . and into your places!

The last line is repeated three times—"Go up the *aia!* Go down the *aia!*" he orders with final lustiness, and, at the crack of his whip, the mules leap the enclosing barrier of piled sheaves, are rubbed down with the water and vinegar he has called for in the name of Saint Simon, are fed and let free.

At sundown the evening food of *minestra* is eaten on the cleared threshing floor. There is music now and wine and wrestling, and tricks of strength. Now the *canzuni*, or broad topical songs are sung, this time not to a silent audience, as at the autumn sowing, but to open criticism and gibes which the singer scores off in answering verse. These men who improvise words to traditional music, using recent local happenings, births, marriages, political events and the personalities of the neighborhood for their subjects, are often famous beyond their own localities. They are found at festas and at the vintage, or in the piazzas, or at an evening gathering at a villager's house. Often their abilities have been handed down to

them from earlier generations, from a father who has taught them these old simple musical rhythms they use to give zest to the fresh subjects which are of the day, even of the day's work just past. They are the troubadours of the country, where newspapers do not exist and books are all but unknown. They are as essential to the life of the *contadini* as is the music of the accordion itself. The "poet" stands in the center of the *aia*, ringed about with laughter. He may be caustic, condemning an injustice, or baudy, or simply gay, but he must be lively-witted and of endless improvisation, for then he will be applauded by all hands. After him comes a short round of furious dancing, of mad whirling and leaping and then in the open, on the straw or under a temporary shelter, they go to bed.

There was something that held us to the flat-topped rock that juts out from Enna like the prow of a ship high above a verdant ocean; a bare table of rock, freshly windy in the warm May afternoon; this shrine of Ceres looking out over a country of ripe grain. The town, the small shops, the cafés, men working at carpenter benches, at shoes and iron ware, tailoring and tinkering and selling a spool of thread, women cooking in hot rooms, weaving and gossiping—these seemed petty and unimportant beside the magnificence of miles and miles of grain. Here was something, we thought vaguely, that was spacious and Greek and uncluttered and very beautiful indeed. Swallows came sailing close to us and all but brushed us with motionless wings. Two donkeys grazed nose to nose some hundreds of

feet below and far away toward Leonforte, on a looping white thread of road, a dozen carts made no more progress than the watched hands of a clock.

We reminded ourselves rather sternly that we were tourists, that the guide book said the cathedral was fourteenth century, that inside were black alabaster columns, set on grotesque bases, and that the treasury held the jewelled crown worn each year by the Madonna when she makes her appearance in procession through the streets—"a crown of pure gold, eight inches high, and although the diamonds, sapphires, rubies and emeralds inset are of great value, the exquisitely chiselled, enameled figures in the medallions which illustrate the life of Christ are still more precious!" Also, we read, there is the votive jewelry given in gratitude for prayers answered; rings, watches, chains, silver ornaments, brooches set with pearls . . . Ah yes, these should be seen, this crown, those alabaster columns. Yet too vivid in our minds was the procession that Cicero once had seen, when "the priests of Ceres came to meet me with garlands of vervain and with fillets," and we remembered that he thought "the city does not appear to be a city, but a shrine and . . . the people of Enna think that Ceres dwells among them."

If, at the moment, there seemed more than enough fourteenth century cathedrals, each with such and such capitals, each with Madonnas complete with votive crowns, there was in all Christendom, we decided, only one church that sheltered the unique relique to be found under the sagging, hardly weather-tight roof of S. Spirito in this Sicilian city of Enna. To be sure, the

guide book said nothing about the little church which, we were elsewhere assured, contained the cooking stove at which the Virgin was standing when she received the Angel of the Annunciation, and the tiles on which her feet rested when that unique event took place. It was an astounding fact! Namely, that here in the interior of Sicily, was this very stove in person, so to say. Slowly we repeated the words over, "the stove at which the Virgin stood when . . ." But no, it was too fantastic. But yes, they said, it was true. The Virgin was at a stove as any housewife might be standing, when the angel came. *Eccolo!* There in Santo Spirito it was. We could see it for ourselves, touch it, all but cook on it, if this were necessary, as final proof that it was actually a stove.

To our questions that had to do with the miraculous journey of this object to Sicily and to Enna, there would be the convenient shrug. "*Chi sa?* Who knows? Who knows how it was that the image of the Madonna now in the *Duomo*, she of the crown of jewels and the rare enamels, happened to be found by fishermen drifting in the sea, which, put into an ox-cart, was brought by these slow animals without human guidance all the way overland to Enna? O well, why not? And as though to silence any doubts, Santo Spirito displays a crown of thorns and a stone seat on which the twelve apostles sat. Yes, these also. Like the silk hat of a conjurer, Santo Spirito could produce for the asking—What could it not produce? A word to the dusty sacristan and what marvels might not appear! Then even Ceres and the rock of her temple must share the honors at Enna, not

with the *Duomo*, but with this lesser place of worship, so that for long centuries it will be remembered as the place of a great pagan shrine and—little Santo Spirito.

It happened that the one thing more than any other that took us to Enna the third of May, was the animal fair, said to be the largest in the island. Exact dates are rather meaningless in Sicily, and we found that the fair was not to be held until two weeks later. Nor could we stay over three days for the annual festa on the shores of Persephone's own lake of Pergusa. Men and women and children go down from the town for a day of merrymaking, for a spring picnic of eating and dancing and drinking. They have kept this simple bucolic holiday a great many years, these people of Enna. We asked, "Is it an old custom?" "*Ma si! Vecchissima!*" How old? "*Chi sa!*" Very old, certainly very old must be the festa of Pergusa. The lake is not impressive. It is shallow and murky, the shores are treeless, and the May sun can beat down heavily and hot.

"But is it," we asked, "a pleasant place, the lake?" Our informer shrugged as though to say, what matter if it is beautiful; do not people go there, and is there not song and food and wine? We wanted to recite the fine old translation for him:

> "There stands a broad lake near to Enna's walls,
> Men call it Pergus—not Cayster's wave
> More musical with song of frequent swans.
> The veiling woods o'erhang its face, and ward
> The fires of baffled Phœbus. From the grove
> Breathes coolness:—from the turf a thousand flowers
> Blush with the hues of Tyre.—"

"What," we asked this shopkeeper, "what saint do they celebrate there? Santa Persephone, perhaps?"

"Come?" he demanded.

We repeated the name—Persephone. He had never heard of that one. No, he said, it was just a small festina that they held each year.

Nicosea

VII

THE animal fair we missed at Enna we saw without prearrangement at Gangi, which is on the motor road from Palermo across to Catania, and it was in this same unscheduled fashion that we stayed the night at Nicosea a dozen miles beyond.

Somewhere on this excellent road, a great deal of it new, which is to say, perfect, a rear wheel refused to do its work in the world. Our driver then lifted his black-clothed bulk out of the small front seat into which it was necessarily wedged, pulled at his cap and assumed that expression of astonished surprise that he would have shown had his best friend suddenly hit him in the face. Then disbelief came to him. Of course, there could be nothing of this sort the matter! It was too absurd, it was a dream. So he climbed into the car again and instantly was happy. But faith alone, not even the faith of a Sicilian in his car that is like the faith of a fond father in his son, was enough to produce out of air, out of a gearless wheel (vaguely it was this difficulty) the miracle of motion. He called on the Madonna, softly. Once more he extricated himself from the seat and stood by the wheel which so unreasonably had refused to function.

Did he know what was the matter, we inquired.

He did not. He said this with the easy finality of a Sicilian, which is to say, a small child.

Could he find out, perhaps fix it?

"Chi sa?" He was very busy for a few moments jacking up the wheel, then he looked up and down the wide, unfrequented road for help or inspiration, or it may have been, merely in search of human companionship in the person of another Sicilian, in another Sicilian car. The sun was very hot, for Sicily in midsummer can be just this, to express it by simple means. Yes, very hot indeed. Across the side of a brown-burned hill we could see a thin, waving line of soldiers who maneuvered in mock battle. We felt sorry for them marching in woolens and carrying guns and packs. A train of five mules laden with wheat straw from some threshing floor came down towards us. A hawk hung against the pale blue sky, motionless, menacing.

Then Salvatore went to work, went furiously to work, as though at last stricken into mad activity by the enormity of his plight, his loneliness in this great sun-seared world and his danger of being forever imprisoned in the purgatory of this roadside. He was a huge young man. He sighed and dripped, he perhaps prayed. In the toolbox of the running board there was a hammer with a broken handle, a couple of rusty wrenches, a handful of nuts and bolts, bits of wire, sand and gravel, a few pieces of tan leather and the foot of a worn black sock. I itemize these only to explain the complete faith of a Sicilian in his Fiat; not to blame him, rather to praise him, for I hold that such pure belief is as splendid as it is rare.

We asked, as impossible people will, where was the nearest garage. He was busy with the broken hammer and the rusty bolts which he appeared to be pounding vigorously into the hub cap. We asked if there might not be a passing car. He shrugged and wiped his wet forehead. Suddenly he rose from his knees, threw back into the box the bits of iron he had not been able to use, took out the jack, and wedging his person once more in the driving seat, started the motor. Was it fixed so soon? We were incredulous. "*Sisignore.*" Would it go to the next town? "*Ma, si!*" he smiled broadly. Of course it would, he assured us and he believed it. It would, he said grandly, run twice around the world—to America and back! He waved an arm; he loomed above us, proud and careless and confident.

Strangely enough, the car did move forward, it did run, it did take us past Petralia and to the hill that cuts around the unimpressive town of Gangi. The grey roofs of the Gangi were up at our left and below the walled road was the gentler slope of the hill on which the town is placed, and there the animal fair was spread out before us, many hundreds of mules and asses, and cows and sheep and goats and pigs, nearly as many men and a few booths selling pack saddles, harnesses and the inevitable sweet cakes. We stopped to watch.

Close under us the mules were held in lots of a dozen or two by herdsmen with their long staffs, and below them the cattle wandered in less dense masses of dark brick-brown over the pale golden buff of the sun-burned slope. To the right across a shallow water run were the sheep and goats. Pigs wandered about

underfoot. Scattered among all of these animals stood the men, dressed invariably in an uncompromising black deepened to jet, to the hard sheen of jet by the sun that fell heavily on them and then seemed to radiate upward from the earth to veil the mountains over which we had just come. These men, grain and cattle raisers, proprietors of many hundred hectares or owners of only the dozen goats they grazed on rented mountain sides too poor and rocky for cultivation, wore for the occasion their traditional black, their best clothing of heavy woolen corduroy, caps and nail-studded shoes. The small white V of shirts under buttoned coats was the only relieving detail. Their faces were the brown of polished leather, the worn leather of a harness strap. Their eyes were dark, quick moving, observant, their mouths wide and close lipped, their voices held to an unsouthern restraint. They are the island's hill people living in a country of few towns, of distances and silence and the unimpeded sweep of winter wind, even snow, and this stern tyranny of summer sun. For here one must recognize that tyranny. It rests weightily on the earth that quivers beneath it; not for an intense hour of noon, but from early dawn to evening. At night the earth tries to be free from it, but summer nights are too short. Nothing green lives on these fields in mid-season. All life is burned away for these months of the year, as if in this time of its high supremacy it countenances no smallest plant, no single leaf that might hold against it a minute banner of vital green. But these men refuse to admit servitude, these proud mountain men who defy the sun's brilliance with their uncom-

promising black, standing out vividly, even heroically, in a sharply-defined silhouette that holds its significant human form even at great distances. They do not permit themselves to be lost in the obliterating intensity.

Fresh from seacoast gatherings, this animal fair at Gangi seemed to us very little Sicilian. It was too silent, too business-like, too unemotional. We watched mules being bought in low voices and thought of the vociferous theatrics that accompany the purchase of a four lire jack-knife at a beach fair. Here at Gangi the tension of barter was all the greater for its repression. Men faced one another with scarcely opening lips and all but motionless hands and arms, and the circle of onlookers was silent also, as if stilled by the potentialities of the scene. The principals seldom gave way to their audience as we were accustomed to see them do, acting with one eye on their opponent and another on the crowd. Here was too intent a focus of eye and mind together. There was something very nearly murderous in their mention of lire and weights and condition. Softer and more vocal, unsteadier and more charming and likeable are the Sicilians of the sea and the lemon groves and vineyards. The men of Gangi were resistant and self-contained and when we walked about among them, spoke here and there, admired an animal, asked a question, listened to a low argument, they did not show very much interest in us, as *forestieri,* whereas at Letojanni we were regarded with the same amused and noisy concern that they would have shown for a pink donkey or a pair of bushmen in furs and skins.

Leaving the fair at Gangi, we were towed the fifteen

miles to Nicosea. Salvatore had again worked, prayed, cursed; but he was defeated and, inch by inch, driven back to the grey acceptance of his fate. The Sicilian winning is heroic and amusing, but the Sicilian losing is an uninspiring sight indeed. This one became wholly incapable of any action, of any thought even. Body and mind together he was reduced to a weary and lifeless shrug. Gangi was impossible as a place to spend the night, but how to get to Nicosea, ourselves or the automobile that needed mending, he could not say; he refused to say. He was past coping with facts—wheels, repairs, roadsides, gods, *forestieri* and all, and the world was black and friendless and homeless, and it was four o'clock in the afternoon and night was coming on. There was no public bus, no passing motors. Was there a car in Gangi? We were a little way from the village, having left it under our own power. Could something be found to tow us in? Would he go back and see about this? From time to time he pounded petulantly at the battered wheel hub. But something *must* be done! He shrugged. "Do something!" we urged. He was not far from tears. His bulk was soft and his mind was clogged with self-pity and despair. There are moments when one is not delighted by the Sicilian temperament.

We were towed by the only car in Gangi and we stayed the night at the old town of Nicosea. The hotel, which had not over a half dozen rooms, is called La Patria and is new, owned by a returned New York barber, a pleasant man and host and, I am sure, an excellent father as well, for he treated us with thoughtful

paternal consideration. We are friends! I hope he prospers so far from the Manhattan Island he loves.

It happened to be festa in Nicosea. Two bands in the piazza! A procession of the Virgin was to start at eight o'clock and at nine fireworks would be let off. What more could one ask for? We had hired another car to take us on to Taormina the next morning. We would have dinner and a clean bed. A café was waiting to serve us in the piazza where we could listen to music. The world of Sicily looked bright, that a little while before had appeared distressingly dull.

After our coffee we turned from the thronged piazza into an alley and from it we found a street—it was called a Via—a passage that one could all but reach across, and that went sharply up the hill, widened a few paces where the front of a diminutive church faced down at us, turned a little and then climbed on. Every doorway was filled with people standing in revealing light from the low openings. Above our heads from every iron balcony leaned figures, leaned faces, rather, that the diffused illumination from below shadowed into uncertain masks. The church of the Virgin, they said, was well out of sight above the town that lies in a saddle between a castello, whose rugged battlements showed black against the sky, and a second eminence of rock, lower and built over with houses that were attached to it by what means I do not know. At night it was all a lifting mass of broken shadow, glints of roof, very dark pockets of emptiness, the spot of sheen from a lighted wall of white plaster, of dwellings that appeared to be hung in the night. Nicosea, unsub-

stantial and unsupported, was dangerously pendent over our heads, distorted, actually unearthly. Do what we might, a town could not be made of it that night; it was not a possible place of habitation, even in Sicily that has its own ideas of places than can be lived in. We ventured timidly away from the security of a piazza that obviously was a piazza, from the church there that was not suspended by its steeple from the stars, and when we did go, it was like entering the improbability of a dream.

I have tried to write of Sicilian festa, festas large and small, elaborate and primitive, that by pure good fortune or careful planning we have seen, but the brief moment of lights and color and moving people that came toward us in Nicosea down the narrowest of streets, will remain, I think, the most memorable of them all. It was so momentary, so vivid and composed, and it moved with a rhythm, part to part, that was quite its own. It had the virtue of freshness and originality and a fortunate unity that kept it within its small frame. The band that preceded the procession stopped playing somewhere above and its blatant music that would have been too clamorously confined by the walls close about us, was taken up by a single drum. Beside the church that faced toward us there was a dim light and into it came this white-haired drummer-man with his roll of hollow sound, and then the first of the standard-bearers, balancing on a wooden mast not less than twenty feet high a great banner of yellow satin, an old banner overworked with a device in bold color. Seen against the dark of the house-tops it was brilliant and heraldic,

YOUR TRUE SICILIAN ALWAYS ADMIRES A GOOD STORY TELLER AND THIS MONK IS OBVIOUSLY TELLING A PARTICULARLY ENTERTAINING ANECDOTE.

THE PEASANT WOMAN STILL CARRIES HER WATER FROM THE FOUNTAIN IN THE AMPHORA OF HER GREEK ANCESTORS.

The Festa at Nicosea

folding heavily down and waving a little from the support that was so flexible that it undulated as the bearer struggled to keep its great weight balanced in his cupped hands. About this *gonfalone* were grouped a dozen men in bright yellow gowns bound loosely by a cord at their waists and reaching to their feet. They carried lighted iron lanterns that swung with their steps. Behind them came another banner, this one of scarlet and gold, and the attendants were also in scarlet; then still another standard, and finally two pure white satin flags with designs in gold and higher than the others even, advanced side by side. The Image followed at the end with people crowded about her *vara* and her many jewels catching the uncertain light.

The procession came slowly towards us and passed—those high, exultant banners in that narrow street. No Sicilian bombs had ever given us this feeling of brave and joyous festival and no brassy music played by any Sicilian band had been the clear trumpeting of these flags. Not only were our eyes lifted up to them; they carried along our bodies as well, so that the whole procession raised to their height seemed to march above the rough cobbles of the street. But we did not follow when, beyond us, they turned out of sight. What we had seen was very perfect; it was enough.

Nicosea does not disappoint by daylight. The impression of medieval pageantry that the flags had given us did not evaporate in the morning sun, for there was Count Roger's castello and a fine old church, whose tower must have once been a fortified turret; and there were still those dwellings that seemed to be crowding

up the other cliff-side as though in fear of raiding parties from neighboring stronghold towns. This Lombard Nicosea is undiluted middle ages; a place of men-at-arms, of forays and charges and the clash of sword play at the gates. It does not know it is eleventh century. No one will offer to guide you about or show you the points of interest or sell you picture postal cards or Sicilian antiques. It is on the most interesting motor road across the island, a road that goes through the very best of this hill country. Nicosea, the finest of the hill towns, is certainly the least visited of them all.

Teatro Furioso

VIII

IN Sicily the theater is also alive. To use this last word is not to write a misnomer, for here it is given over entirely to the celebration of violence and high daring and combat and very audible, outringing speech. They go only one road, these marionettes of the island of volcano, the way of peril and danger; inevitably they meet it and always they conquer. What an exuberance of sheer being! What battles! What a mighty to-do! Nightly in every city of any size and in many isolate villages, fishing towns or mountain settlements, the hearty pound and thrash of the Middle Ages are lived over again by these knights in the most resplendent of armor, the most brilliant of silks, helmeted and plumed and shield-defended, with their prodigious long swords firmly in their hands, who wage again that old battle of light against darkness, of Christian gentleman —*sans peur et sans reproche*—against infamous Mohammedan barbarian. Carelessly the young Paladins fling themselves into the tumult. Against what odds! They conquer; but only after what dire checks! As long as these figures are swung to the small stage, Sicily cannot easily forget that once it was Saracen and infidel, and that once rode down from the north their deliverers, those fair-haired, not to be denied sons of Tan-

cred, the Norman; and that one of these, Roger d'Hauteville, was their first Christian King.

They are truly heroic, these puppets of the *Teatri dei Piccoli.* They are the symbols of great men and great days and deeds. Nothing, it seems, could better give the salty flavor, the lusty hue and cry of the extraordinary Sicilian adventure of these Normans as does an hour in a Sicilian theatre of marionettes. The charming naïveté is there, a good measure of theatric flourish is never lacking and the furious half-mad joy of physical combat is uppermost, leavened as it was by that quaint code called Chivalry. The Sicilian puppets are too grotesque? Yet there was enough, surely, of the patently absurd in the age they portray. After all, this was no later era of cool reason, nor a time of the organized conquests of Rome, still less the inundation of vast barbarian hordes, but a century or two when men delighted to come against single men in the focused shock of their two bodies and when a dozen or so young adventurers from the north could cleave their way to an island kingdom.

Seventy-five years ago there was published in Palermo a book of nearly four thousand pages entitled "The History of the Paladins," that brought together the hundreds of plays which form the cycle enacted in all the little theatres of Sicily. These bombastic exploits were traditionally centered about the court of Charlemagne, and they were no more than a late compilation of material already familiar from the fourteenth century "Canturi" and the *Orlando Innamorato*

of Boiardo and, of course, the classical *Orlando Furioso* of Ariosto.

"The History of the Paladins," however, was simply an acting version of these tales that long before had been converted to the uses of the Sicilian marionette theatre. The texts were taken from the lips of the puppet masters themselves, who had them from fathers or uncles, for in this word of mouth fashion they had come down through the years. Generation after generation in turn had memorized these fine, flamboyant speeches and had perfected the action that went with them; the art of manipulating the heavy wooden figures, their entrances and exits and their exaggerated angular pantomime. These are not delicately-articulated dolls controlled by a maze of wires, but heavy and wooden, moved by a central bar of iron from the head, another from the sword arm and a stout cord from the other wrist. The legs are hinged only from the hip, there is no bend at the waist, and the head can turn only from side to side. But the arms, jointed at the shoulder and elbow, are in constant revealing action as, obviously, a Sicilian audience would demand that they be, and from first to last, no matter the scene or the situation, the knights and the lesser soldiers carry both ponderous sword and shield. They are heavy, sturdy figures, operated by the simplest devices, for, like the men they portray, they must withstand harsh treatment in the hurly-burly of battle where anything less durable would go into fragments and shreds after the first performance.

These same stories, or rather, these innumerable

episodes in one vast, loosely-jointed saga, were also kept alive by the more unpretentious story-tellers, who recounted and themselves portrayed in a corner of a café or street or in the shade of a wall, these same dramas. They were really strolling players; a down-at-the-heels lot of thieves and beggars, with occasionally among them an artist, who would return each evening to a small piazza in the crowded center of the city and draw his audience in a semi-circle, close about him. Likewise, down through this actor came a tradition of word and gesture which would convey the strong and shifting emotions and picture forth the theme that would hold his public and put *soldi* into his battered hat. With his own single voice and body he brought the many characters to his imaginary stage, set them in motion, carried them through the play. Only a Sicilian would attempt this task and bring it off; a Sicilian who in casual conversation with a friend, invariably climbs upon a stage and dramatizes the slightest trivialities of the day.

But it is in the *Teatrino* that the Paladin still lives and for a lire or two he can be seen there. The best of these little theatres will be found in an old quarter of Palermo or Messina a few steps away from the modern streets, perhaps near the water front, or the market; certainly it is not the one which puts an advertising notice in the lobby of a tourist hotel. For above all, there must be no self-consciousness, no playing up to the unnatural, for once the traditional form is broken, little but absurdity remains. So it will be found on some side street, probably below the sidewalk level,

in a room with a low, arched ceiling of stone, make-shift benches, a few odd chairs, a cast-off hand organ and a restricted stage elaborately decorated by the hand of the puppet-master whose liberal use of the primary colors in florid design makes up for any lack of artistic skill. The performance will seem about to begin a long half hour before the curtain is raised, and this occurs whether there is an audience of a dozen small boys or a crowded house of men. The music plays haltingly and the mechanism needs frequent repair, but whenever it stops entirely the clamor is immediate and plain-spoken for it to be put in action again. In fact, it is not a silent and bored interval of waiting, but a loud and thoroughly enjoyed prelude to the production itself. Sicilians are never impatient at delay, whether it is a train, the procession of a saint, a friend's arrival, or a puppet show, as long as there are other people about them, as long as one of those public and all-inclusive discussions can be enjoyed. In this theater there will be a great deal of feigned annoyance, loud cries for the proprietor, reflection on his theater and his personal character, witticisms at his expense, criticism of the music, the hardness of the seats; all friendly enough, for in the rapid interchange of sharp comment and telling phrase, they will be quite content to await indefinitely the raising of the curtain while they, themselves, hold the stage.

A knowing management gives the audience a free hand and tongue. It sends out a boy to sell the slightly-sweetened soda water and another boy with salted squash seeds to induce even greater thirst. The cries of

the vendors are shrill and persistent over the general racket. The crank of the piano is turned in brief gusts of energy by a very inadequate small child. The close room is a heavy haze of blue cigarette smoke and breathing becomes difficult. A splendid squabble is going on in the front benches where the smallest youngsters are crowded, a laborer is asleep against the wall, and still there is no indication that the advertised program will ever begin. But what will seem even more improbable, looking about at the audience of old men and bulky longshoremen, young fellows in dark, tight suits and sleek hair, street urchins and infants in arms, is that the curtain, which, by the way, will probably represent Etna in the full scarlet flame of eruption, will sometime lift to disclose marionettes costumed out of the Middle Ages representing Paladins of the Emperor Charlemagne. One would as soon expect to see a tenth century miracle play drawing a crowd in Times Square. This audience doubtless knows its Hollywood and Charlie Chaplin, but it knows and admires the brave Orlando as well.

The curtain of the erupting Etna goes up at last without warning and the cries and clatter cease.

From left and right two men-at-arms enter wearing a mass of tin armor, a shield and formidable spear. They are three feet tall. They walk in stiff and stately fashion with a military rigidity, as if the metallic trappings were as restricting as they look, and with a wave of their spear-arms they announce no less a personage than the King himself, who appears robed in regal purple trimmed with white fur and wearing a heavy,

golden and jewelled crown. There is no pause. "Summon Orlando," his majesty cries, and at the word, the hero, this peerless one, is swung in, feet off the ground, arms waving, armor clanking, and the red plume of his helmet floating behind. He all but collides with his master Charlemagne and he seems to threaten him, so impetuous are his repeated bows of fealty and his wild sword waving that proclaims no servile, passive acceptance of authority, but a joyous and active affection for his king. Immediately the situation is stated in a long speech of the king's; immediately the action begins. Orlando's companions gather, swords are struck against shields in defiance, in sheer exuberance, and royalty is overwhelmed by the brave impatience of its knights.

On this stage is set forth a masculine era for the delight of a Sicilian world that is still masculine. During generations these plays have been enacted for men, for children, yes, but only the male children of Sicily who, at six and seven, already have acquired prerogatives and already have begun to take their position in a life which gives them a dominance and a wide authority. There is, to be sure, a love element in certain of the episodes, but it is that remote and highly romantic love that was a subordinate phase of medieval chivalry—a fair lady in a distant castle tower, a lady far outside the moil of battle, as from life itself; a symbol merely, a bloodless ideal. She was like the silken scarf fluttering lightly and unfelt about his steel-clad arm; a pretty, delicate thing that did not hinder him in his man's business of battle. Yet it could be glanced at now and again, when he remembered it, and it fed his pride and

conveniently justified him—for did he not ride, in her fair name, in all manner of pleasantly murderous deeds?

It is hardly love that this theatre of physical violence portrays. From the first entrance the quickening pace of the action leads in an inevitable crescendo to the final battle. There may be a brief moment of comic relief or, as an interlude, a bravura passage of religious manifestations during which all the resources of the theatre are used to produce startling effects—visions of angels, monsters, fiery devils, but these are enjoyed and discounted by an audience that is always waiting for the supreme moment when the black Saracen, who has played villain all the while, is finally confronted by the most Christian and fair-haired knight. Only then is the main issue joined, the climax reached and breaths held. For the Moor is of the blackest hue that paint can make him; a grotesque figure with an imbecile head, long swinging arms and a huge hand that holds a cruelly-curved scimitar. His eyes are orbs of horrible implication and his wide nigger mouth, fixed in a leering grin, is scarlet lipped, showing teeth like wolf fangs. He wears the skins of a barbarian and he utters no intelligible words, only the most repellent, bestial cries that the vocal organs of the puppet master can, by long practice, be made to emit.

Thus was the Arabian visualized in 1000 A.D.

In Palermo today the Saracen is still the half-brute, half-devil that he was reputed to be. And, in truth, he is altogether splendid. No less perfect a villain could have roused men to that old glamorous adventure, nor could bring them to a *Teatrino* today. He is, one suspects, the

drawing force, the veritable star, the unsung hero of the Sicilian marionette stage.

During the performance the scenes may change, but direct and uninvolved action goes merrily on. These men stand toe to toe and strike, and strike again, to the music of iron against copper and tin, aided by the shouts of the master and his entire family (one imagines that distant relatives have been asked in for the occasion); by the rhythmic stamping of feet on the loose boards of the stage until the whole structure shakes and the dust of battle rises realistically. From all this the audience is not to be excluded. Treble cries of delight come from the front benches, adult bass from the rear, for Orlando is standing single-handed now against the Saracen hordes—four black men and their curved swords; his own, like the famous weapon of that other d'Hauteville son, William Bras-de-Fer, is a weapon of prodigious length and devastating execution. On and on this clashing and crying and thumping goes, while against the back-drop another battle is waged; that of distorted, looming shadows which also leap and swing and strike. Another Saracen is sliced, head to heels, in neatly-symmetrical sections; a head tumbles and rolls in a fearful fashion across the stage. Dead bodies are piled like so many sticks of wood. With mechanical regularity the sword of the Paladin falls, is lifted, falls. One Saracen only now remains, one villain, and Orlando, truly *furioso*, steps forward. A moment of tense pause. Crash! And the black Moor falls at his feet. *Ah—!* The curtain is down.

The death of a puppet is indeed a heart-rending thing. That abandoned, stiff-limbed staggering, that descending half-circle with his heels a pivot, his flopping arms flung wide, sword dangling, is very nearly too sad, too pathetic a moment to be borne. Something which, for all the outer absurdity of painted feature and ridiculous angularity, has just been living in a fine vortex of life and endeavor, has become as static and as dead as these few pieces of wood. This veriest arch-villain, this last despicable Moor, who lies atop of the heap of his slain companions, so wrings us at the moment of his death, that gladly we would bring him back again to his old life, no matter how menacing that life might prove to be, no matter how unchristian his heathenish soul. He has at last entangled us in his own dark being. His broad absurdities delighted us, we remember, and his violence provoked pleasant shudders; but more, the certainty of his defeat, like a Fate, lifted him to the heights of the tragic. Besides, we were of the secret opinion that perhaps he was rather a jolly fellow at heart, and that had there been provocation, he might have broken into a nigger shuffle of dancing, a loose-jointed clog to the music of a plantation tune. One feels that he was never quite happy in his historical rôle of Mohammedan devil, as Orlando so plainly was at ease in his own swaggering pride; that in truth, he had been butchered a little unjustly to provide a Christian holiday. And so that great sword-thrust of Orlando's lost something of its heroic proportions, as with it Orlando himself lost stature as a knight and a man. He, too, we think, should have seen and

felt the pity that might then have stayed his hand. Or was it the dull thud of the falling bar of iron against the floor? Was it the invisible hand, like a greater Fate that, loosing the bar, dealt out death to this being; a sudden cruel releasing of all that gave life and movement to our friend the Moor? There was an ominous finality in the sound, an audible period; here, one realized, was a full stop, an End.

The bond that links us to the puppet, that can tangle us like this so securely in the thread of his existence, is his beautiful purity of being. On the larger stage we must contend as best we can with the fatal duality which is its essence; that duality of character and man—Barrymore the man, the actor, and Hamlet the melancholy Dane. A puppet, however, is only a thing of wood and obvious wires; not Barrymore, nor any Sicilian player, but only a character which we, ourselves, not others, invest with the necessary blood and sinew of a living Hamlet, a Paladin, a Moor. Being nothing else, this puppet is all Orlando, as Barrymore, being a man, never can be all Hamlet. Human failings, human limitations, the puppet does not know; only perfection remains. To the extent that we can imagine pure heroism, of just such a transparent heroism is Orlando made.

Out from us on our benches to those figures on the stage travels this strong projection of our minds and our emotions; our conceptions of chivalry, of kingship, of menace and of swaggering pride. They breathe, these small actors, because we breathe, they are brave because we are without fear, or they show treachery (and it can be this also), because we, too, know what treachery is,

and they are beautiful in their armor because—hang it! —because we *are* beautiful dressed in that glistening raiment and those waving red plumes. When all this we have become is struck to the ground and is still as no actor, even the greatest, has ever portrayed that complete stillness, we not only see the blow, but we feel it and go lax ourselves and circle and fall. This one will not get up when the curtain is lowered, dust himself, change into prosaic street clothes, light a cigarette and go off to bed. Here is the very quintessence of death, the ultimate wooden stillness of body, the silence of all voice. Yes, yes, the death of a puppet is a heart-rending thing indeed.

In unknown temples the puppet once moved in the ritual of a forgotten faith. He appears in our day in the image of a San Giuseppe, a San Giorgio, a black Filippo carried at festa through the street of a Sicilian town, and even on the stage, something of this older divinity remains. He has unity and balance, a precision that is stylized and flawless. He is far too great an artist to copy slavishly in detail the walk of a man whom for this moment he deigns to portray, as he scorns a photographic reproduction of a man's emotions. He does not stoop to the easy trick of laughter and tears. Tragedy, he knows in his profound wisdom, is more than a pair of wet eyes, and death more than a momentary holding of the breath.

The *Teatro dei Piccoli* to search out is the theater in a back alley—with a single exception, and that is in, of all places, Taormina, the tourist center of Sicily. Yet

there it is, only just off the Corso and its patrons are these same tourists, for the native Taorminasean is far too sophisticated to attend a silly show of this kind when he can go to a tea dance at an expensive hotel.

The figures are larger than any we found in Palermo and "home made" by some local carpenter and painted by no more expert hands. You will find no tricky devices here, but only the standard episodes of the Paladins played straight, as the expression goes, but played with zest and gusto and, more rare, a feeling for comedy. A sly drollery often peers out of the button eyes of a man-at-arms and is accented by an unexpected impudent gesture or an absurd dangle of the arm. The costumes are frayed from years of use and the breastplates are dented, but there is a dragon—Heavens! What a dragon; a paragon of dragons, with a mouth like an alligator and with stuffing coming out of ripped seams in his mottled green skin of cloth. Nor is there a suave, mechanical perfection about these performances. The curtain refuses to come down and the master walks on—rather the dusty black trousers and worn shoes of a man who seems to be of gigantic size after having watched people only four feet high appear, and the repair is made and the curtain is finally lowered. Or a control cord tangles and a huge hand and arm comes down from above to free it. Back-stage curses are frequent. A figure all but falls off the stage and has to be dragged to safety. This sort of crudity you will find.

There is also a voice speaking the classical lines that is deep and flowing, and there are those touches of rakish comedy and that ingratiating dragon, and a final,

climactic battle that is sheer hell let loose; perhaps the most forthright, satisfying minute of hot combat to be seen on any stage anywhere in the world.

I have not forgotten the old, one-legged lad who is the orchestra. He sits at the front, tipped far back against the wall. A yellow beam from the nearest of the two footlights angles out to illuminate his round face. His red cheeks are puffed as he blows on his wooden shepherd's pipe and his white hair is tousled. His keen eyes never move from the action on the stage, held there by the same fascination that fixes the boy's gaze from the front row, a *contadino's* who stands by the door, an English A.R.A.'s and ours in the last.

Old Joseph

IX

IT so happens that Joseph lives in Aci Castello. This Aci Castello is an unpretentious small village of a few hundred people situated on the coast between Taormina and Catania. No traveller would ever go to it although many have seen from a train or an automobile the picturesque crumbling castle that stands on its black rock jutting out from the low shore. Yet it is here that the good Joseph has his earthly being; just here and nowhere else is his home. And as one must pause now and again in what seems for the moment to be rather a senseless, even a little mad career of voyaging; a silly rushing about over parts of the earth essentially foreign, looking at the unfamiliar (with ah's and oh's); meeting so momentarily and parting so abruptly with strangers one has not had time to know and whom, one realizes, one would never really know granted long leisure, all done in the name of travel, or education, or fun as the favorite term for it may be—just as one stops rather short and suddenly realizes that in such or such a familiar village in Surrey or Massachusetts or wherever, sits an old Mr. Higgins whom one has known all one's life long, old Higgins with his cracked voice, his white whiskers, his pipe, who is Permanence personified and a single, simple entity in a too vastly varied world, so in a confusion of saints—of

Madonnas of the Lettera, of the Carminie, *della Rocca*, of Pietros here and Pietros in Rome, and Philips black and Philips white, I am very grateful to Joseph of Aci Castello who for me *is* Saint Joseph, now and through all time. Another Joseph may be called by this name, may even closely resemble my saint, but I will be able to shake my head and no amount of argument will coerce me into belief. Only at Aci Castello does Joseph live. Could there be two of old Higgins in the world, who, the town gossips whisper, drinks on the sly, was a gay dog in his day and has never earned a penny in his seventy years of existence? Of course, there is only one. For all I know the tongues of Aci Castello may wag over Joseph, for in truth he has some of old Higgins' dustiness and ineffectuality and quite open friendliness and easy goodwill. For this I like the two of them only the better.

I went to see Joseph (Giuseppe is his name here, but so is Mr. Higgins called Huggins in Massachusetts) on his name day, I believe the nineteenth of March. It was a cool spring day, so I assumed that the traditional bonfires that burn for two or three days to warm him against his coming out after a winter spent indoors had been lighted. He seemed to be quite comfortable when they carried him into the sunny open space in front of his modest church, and while the band played and a few firecrackers were let off, there was a pause to adjust his vestments that were pleasantly worn and mellow with use and to renail more securely his halo of tarnished gold. He did not seem to object and his expression of bland good humor remained during the painful thuds

of the hammer. If the proceeding puzzled him, it was not his nature to bother his head very much about it (ah—Mr. Higgins to the core!); beside, it was so very pleasant to be out, to hear this stirring music, to have the hundred or two of his fellow townsmen dressed in their best, crowding about him, and to know that he would go through all the streets of the village, seeing again the familiar houses, the principal piazza, honored by their gifts and their cheerful voices calling out his name. I remembered that one had only to introduce a friend to old Higgins and to instruct the friend to say, "I have heard about you often, it is a pleasure to meet you," for him to glow with importance and pride.

With two carabinieri walking ahead, with the priest and an assistant riding beside him on the *vara*, the band and the people coming behind, filling the narrow way between the low plaster houses, the tour commenced, the gifts began to be passed up and once in a while a child lifted to kiss the lips that all but smile. His people were generous; a woman ran out with a pair of live pigeons, a man handed up a ribbon-decorated bottle of wine, there were the customary flat loaves of bread with eggs baked in the tops showing white between the lattice-work of crisp brown crust that held them secure. An indignant hen with her legs tied, fluttered foolishly at his feet, a side of fresh goat meat came from the butcher, little girls in fluffy white gave their bunches of flowers and he received a pair of knitted socks, two neckties, a cake with elaborate white frosting, many more bottles of wine, a pig's foot garlanded with flowers, a huge cheese.

It was very jolly. Joseph, as well he might, was more than appreciative and that argued well for the season's crops. Ah, I must remember to take a bit of something to old Higgins when I go home; it would really please him no end.

Vendemmia

X

"*La vendemmia è com' è stata, e sarà sempre, un baccanale*"—always the *vendemmia* has been and always it will be, a baccanale. With these words a Sicilian writing about his people begins to tell of the harvest of grapes. It is the wholly joyous and mirthful festa of the year, a labor that is only play, a necessity that becomes high celebration. The customary words that the foreman speaks as the workers are assembled at dawn of the first day's gathering—"Praise and thanks to the most sacred and divine Sacrament," and to which the pickers respond in chorus, "Always be It praised!" have no power to control something far deeper in them, something far more fundamental than any words of formal belief can denote. Before the Christ, before the old Silenus even, wherever there were people living close to the soil, simple, healthy, unlettered people, there has been this lusty joy, rude and earthy, that ripens with the grapes, that bursts into jocund mirth and dance and singing when the fruit is harvested and the wine is pressed.

Bread is the stern stuff, the strong staff and stay of life; wine is the sweet leaven of warmth and delight. Bread is for the purposeful day's long work, wine for its cessation and ease. Bread they must have to live, but wine to live happily. It softens the hard crust of the

loaf they must eat and it is a symbol to man of these precious moments of careless well-being, of eager passion, of friendliness in his world of labor and bafflement and pain. It is the forgetfulness of song and the benison of deep sleep; his escape of fantasy and dream. With never quite enough bread for his needs, with the half loaf always serving for the whole, a little wine is his reminder that man does not live by bread alone; that he is not the dull, earth-bound body slowly plowing the soil and wearily harvesting it but a free and heaven-touching soul as well. The grain that is his bread he buys with sweat and toil, but wine, he feels, is earth's quenching bounty and reward.

Travagghia la vinnigna, t'insigna, ti sprigna, t'alligna e ti spigna; the Sicilian repeats the old proverb—the work of the vineyard instructs thee, delights thee, reinvigorates thee and lifts thy debts.

"Amuri, amuri, cci veni a la vigna?
Ch'e ricca di racina la compagna!
Lu vigneri accumenza la vinnigna
Na 'ntra lu cori 'n'alligrizza magna!"

Love, love, thou comest now to the vineyard?
It is rich with the fruit of life!
And the workers beginning their labor,
Have only light hearts.

Again and again in his country songs he expresses this happiness, this smiling beneficence that wells up in him as he works along the terraces. It is hard enough work; cultivating, pruning, replanting, staking, but always it seems to him a labor of love.

Another of these songs in the dialect of the island is a blithe recital of his irrepressible spirits. Its translation might be,

Pretty one, here in the vineyard
hearts are set singing,
joy's in the pressing,
work is but dancing!
Who would be healthy
learned and wealthy;
labors the vineyard,
and drinks of its wine.

With the maturing of the grapes under hot September suns, he thinks of their gathering and he must sing—

"Bedda, la racina è matura a la campagna!"—
Dearest, the vineyard is smiling,
for ripe are the grapes in the country;
and the day of the harvest is coming.
Rejoice in the year's full bounty!
How sweet is the fruit, how beguiling!

The rare felicity of the scene the old singers have known from long watching; the girls weaving among the green, bending, straightening, running and pausing, their voices bright and their hands waving.

Fair one the time is coming
when the grapes are gathered,
and the girls run in
and the fruit goes out.
Baskets in hand,

they laugh, the pretty ones
and sing;
and little by little the work is done.

Always a baccanale.

Forty women and girls coming down the narrow path and on down the steps of the rock walls of the terraces, baskets swinging, their bare feet picking a way in and out through the vines, group themselves in such a frieze as the Greek stone cutters often caught and wrought in a relief to circle a wine bowl or to run beneath the cornice of a building; figures that do not imprison movement within their forms but only free it, so that these bodies, the lifted arms, the loosened hair, the simple draperies that flow in the wind of an older Hellenic day, are rhythms as audible as the voices that sing here in a later Sicily, when for the moment of *Vendemmia*, they have not forgotten that the wine god is king. But here it is not grey stone but lively color; a saffron yellow waist, a vivid green skirt, an orange head handkerchief, heightened to an intense brilliance in the clear air that has lost the heavy languor of summer.

Francesco swung his long fennel staff that was the badge of his authority. "To work, wenches! Ugly ones!"

He was a thin, brown little man with a quick eye and a quick hand. He called them female devils and worse.

"Old goat!" a young girl cried at him.

"I'll goat you, my sly one!" He fetched the staff across her wide hips.

The Harvest of the Grapes

"Oh—o—" she protested and protected herself.

"Alfeo! Music!" many cried. "Music! Play for us, Alfeo!"

Alfeo under his olive tree on the upper terrace began to play his accordion. Giuseppe, the young ne'er-do-well, wandered about. He was not here to work, only to dance, to swagger up and down, a flower behind his ear, a roving light in his eye, a provoking smile on his full weak lips. He is handsome. Francesco is the male, their master, but Giuseppe is the male of romance, of their emotions, of their dreams. Old Francesco calls them sluggards and ugly mugs and Giuseppe whispers a soft word of invitation and appeal. He is a rascal, and this they know well. A no-account, a *giovanaccio* from the nearest town, but he is like a young Bacchus and there is not one who does not hope that at the noon rest he will ask her to dance.

Someone had begun to sing. Several baskets were filled and the girls sat beside them eating a choice bunch of grapes they had saved out. The morning sun was hot and down below the terraces that had been cut into the slope, far down below the olives and almonds, there was a strip of golden buff beach, a thin line of white wave and beyond it, the emerald and azure sea as calm as painted glass. Taormina was out of sight but up the coast on its hill was the huddled town of Forza d'Agro and, inland from it, only mountains and deep valleys, hidden villages; and up through twisted olives and great-limbed oaks that grew among the rocks, rose the cliffs of Mt. Ziretto like citadel walls hewn sheer to protect the flat table top of the summit where goats

were grazed and sometimes the shepherd could be seen against the sky.

Francesco harried the sluggards like a thin tan terrier, always the butt of their racy banter, and the quips that brought waves of full-throated laughter. But in reply his tongue did not spare them, nor his active stick. The *vendemmia* is no time to weigh words in the scales of moderation or modesty; it is all freedom. Resentment becomes good-natured laughter and a sharper retort. Comment is broad and forthright and gestures and mimicry become revealing pantomime and the songs a mass of allusion, mad grotesques and the open celebration of bodily vigor and joy. Lips wet with the eaten grapes sing out lips' desires. Here one is young; is woman, wholly glad that man is man. For it is dominated by women, this baccanale, it is their day. Men sometimes work with them and men always direct them, but it is they themselves who set the high key of blithe pagan sensuality that marks this harvest song. Girls from the larger towns who never go into the fields come out for the *Vendemmia* and follow it upward from the sea, higher and higher as the grapes mature later and later in the season. A month they have of this festa, an autumn month of gathering grapes.

"O picciutteddi schetti
rusiddi spampinati,
tagghiati vinnignati,
la me' racina è ccà.
è ccà, è ccà, è ccà!
dintra stu petto sta!

Cari picciotti schetti,
viniticci a la vigna:
ch'è duci la vinnigna!
Amuri mi la fà
la fà, la fà, la fà,
dintra stu pettu sta!"

O pretty young maidens
like opening roses,
gather the vintage,
for the vintage lies here,
it is here, it is here!
inside of my heart!

Dear little maidens,
come to the vintage:
how sweet the vendemmia,
and how sweet lies the love—
it is here, it is here!
inside of my heart.

Alfeo, his knees drawn up, his cheek against his instrument, played from the shade of his olive tree. The slowest had filled her basket.

"In line!" Francesco cried.

Heavy baskets were raised, and there was a struggle to be forward in the file, but Francesco held them back and not until all of them were ready did he say the "Avanti!" and turn his back to lead them up to the *maggazinu,* the building where the *parmentu* is, the pressing floor, on to which the grapes are poured.

There is a country saying that it takes a hundred *aie,* or threshing floors, to make a single *parmentu* where

the grapes are trodden out into wine, so hard is the labor of the treaders, the *pistaturi,* who work there. The doorway of the low-walled building that housed the vats, the press and the casks ready for the finished wine—some of the last year's vintage remained—were shadowed by a deep pergola that cast flecked shade over the earth, moist from a dripping fountain basin. Between the supporting posts wide seats had been built; above were large, lush clusters of fruit grown for the table of the Signore, the owner, carefully tied and tended, slowly maturing and today guarded by the wife of the *fattore,* who bustled in and out authoritatively sharp of voice and plainly superior of manner. Beneath these grapes it was aromatic with the heavy, sweetly acrid odor from the dim building beyond. Just inside of the doorway, a wall, waist high, separated the entrance passage that led on into the storeroom from the stone floor that was some few yards square where the *pistaturi* worked. These five men were in white shirts and cotton drawers that had been rolled high up above their knees, their legs and feet bare and stained red. The only light was from the pergola-shadowed entrance. Beyond them in the larger storeroom, in the *magazzinu* itself, small, heavily-barred windows were cut through the massive walls letting only a soft, grey light fall on the line of great black casks raised above the floor on a platform that circled the walls, or against a bulbous, aqueous, green bottle on the swept stones, against copper measures, baskets stained purple; or that cast into pits of bottomless darkness the sunken vats that would hold the juice as it flowed from under the

stamping bare feet of the men. Hung up against the dull silver of the low ceiling were bunches of scarlet tomatoes drying and a few pendent ears of corn. In the confined *parmentu* the treaders seemed imprisoned in twilight yet their white figures were looming, gigantic. Now the floor was cleared and they rested a moment.

Alfeo and his music came by a shorter way and sat on the low dividing wall. After him the women arrived, turning into the sunny open space in single file, then under the pergola, finally stooping through the low doorway and emptying their baskets, crowding the narrow passage with noisy confusion, defying Francesco's voice and stick as if to prove their right to claim the *vendemmia* as their own. They shoved; Francesco prodded them. They called to the *pistaturi* and he bade them be silent and move on. The door was blocked; Francesco was caught in the confined tangle and the treaders urged the girls to throw him in with the grapes—it was all fine sport; it was *vendemmia*.

With the grapes spread deep on the floor the treading began. A dance, a revolving ritual dance to the quick music of the accordion; a mad stamping, a frenzied treading of the fruit under foot. They were close together, their hands on each other's shoulders, their feet marking time to the increasing rhythm, their voices shouting rather than singing as they swerved abruptly to circle in the other direction. It became a run, a revolving wheel, finally breaking into its separate parts which still whirled and collided until the first, the *primo piede*, was brought to an end.

Alfeo closed his instrument and left to wander back to the vineyard. The *pistaturi*, with wooden shovels, piled the partly crushed fruit in the center, laid over it a wide, circular mat of woven willow, and standing about it in a ring, hands clasped, jumped on it, moving to distribute evenly their weight and to keep the mat level. Through the stone and plaster wall that made the partition between this space and the storeroom, iron gates were cut which let the clear juice run through into the sunken vats. When the mat was laid aside, the grapes were spread and the second *piede* was begun; now with a steadier, calmer treading to a slower song. Four of these operations, sometimes five, are necessary before the iron gates are opened and the pulp is shoveled through.

The floor was once again cleaned and only just in time, for the women with their new load, which Francesco marked with a notch of his knife on his fennel staff, already had started. Alfeo was on his wall, the *pistaturi* had passed around the jug of wine and wiped their lips on the back of stained hands. The first woman to arrive threw in to them a heavy bunch of grapes and it was broken in the rough and tumble scramble. One by one the baskets were emptied to Alfeo's music, the soft ripe fruit slushing down on the pile. The dancing labor on the *parmentu* that is worth, they say, the toil of a hundred threshing floors, began again.

We were a few, perhaps three miles from Taormina, at Mufarbi, a property of so many acres in vineyard and olive and orange trees, terraces of wheat and pastures

for flocks, enclosed vegetable plots and sheltered gardens of flowers—but it cannot be described in this fashion; better to say that it was not far removed from a materialization of many a man's dream—a Sicilian counterpart of those castles in Spain which lift themselves miraculously out of revery and by which one now and again escapes the too immediate walls of a New York apartment, the too-familiar bricks and too-worn sidewalks over which one is fated to travel in a work-a-day world. A castle in Spain. Ah—! Sometime, we promise ourselves, we will find it, for it is never a thing to be laboriously raised stone on stone, to be planned in any dull detail; stairways, baths, closets and water supply. These are absurdities, even vulgarities to be waved away with a careless gesture of the hand. No; always it is to be found. Suddenly some day, we believe, it will stand before us, ready and waiting, the wide door open, the old servitor bowing us in, the rooms swept and appointed, the fire alight, the larder well filled and dinner (after a tub and change) a leisurely hour away. It will all be quite familiar, these rooms, the heartily crackling oak wood that is burned not against any cold, for the climate is not less than perfection, the wide view out over broken country, woods and suave green fields beyond the river slowly flowing at the foot of the slope of garden and lawn—or is it the sea that lies just over those hills and is to be seen in glimpses of blue touched by the light of the low sun? Surely, in one direction there are distant mountains against the sky. All so familiar this, and why not? How often it has been seen. Familiar, but never flat and stale

as other things become. Is there a peacock strutting on the wall? Perhaps. In all events, a huge dog wanders in, his tail awag as we are tying our tie—a long process because we have left the mirror many times to stand at the window that opens on to the balcony. Against the hill over there, the one with the Saracen or Roman tower just showing above the dense trees, is the road to the nearest village and along it the carts of the workers are going home. Is it possible that their singing can be heard? It may be; the air is so still.

Mufarbi happens to be in Sicily, a thousand feet or so above the sea, to the left, the headland of Sant Alessio, below, the fishing town of Letojanni with boats drawn up on the wide beach, and behind one, hillside and valley and winding mule paths, Ziretto and its cliffs, then a higher Monte Venere, and, against the slopes of Santa Maria, the few houses of the hamlet called—surely this is a name out of fantasy—Gallodoro, which is to say, Golden Cock. In the distance, the great heights of the Peloritan are a jagged wall to the north. There is no coast in the world more beautiful than these few miles of Sicilian shore that Mufarbi looks upon.

There are no roads to Mufarbi, only these mule paths in the hills. There are no houses anywhere about it except the scattered small cottages of the *contadini.* It is long and low, built of warm plaster walls and dark-tiled roof and many doorways that give access to the terrace raised above the orchards that drop down to the sea. The interior might be England or Rome—books, deep chairs, open fires, old hangings—and not the ex-

pected appointments of a Sicilian mountain side. Yet Mufarbi is not an anachronism; it is Sicily, and it belongs in that complete, inevitable way that our castle belongs to the land we are pleased to call Spain.

It was here we saw the *vendemmia* and it was just such a harvest of grapes that we would have seen at any of the vineyards about. Mufarbi did not impose a fatal self-consciousness, and when the Signore suggested that the workers come to the terrace after their noon meal and dance, they did not seem to consider us, who wanted to watch them, but they were delighted only because the terrace was spacious and smooth-tiled. We were having our coffee in the shade of a carob tree on a table out of some Florentine palace. We sat like royalty while the boy in white served us and passed cigarettes. Yes, the chap Giuseppe, the handsome one, knew we were watching, but the others quickly forgot.

The Sicilian tarantella is not this dance of Naples. On the mainland one can believe its supposed evolution from the paroxysms caused by the deadly spider, or more accurately, its birth from the frenzied religious "dances" in honor of San Giovanni that swept over Italy in the fourteenth century. But in country Sicily it becomes changed and tempered with a slower, more formal grace, even a dignity. Professionals in cafés and hotels invariably pervert the tarantella by accentuating its tempo and abandon, by interposing all sorts of tricks and impossibly involved maneuvers; they fling their arms and execute dervish spins and doubtless they win applause, but the *contadino* dances with his arms on his hips except during certain figures when he raises

them with elbows bent as though he held castanets, or they are lowered and his hands clapped beneath his lifted knee, yet his back is straight and his head high, and only his waist is supple and his feet active. The woman partner is little more than foil, a center about which he always moves. He advances toward her, he retreats from her, while she is always passive and her steps are few. She holds him, nevertheless, to the small circle that he describes about her, and when two couples are dancing together in a set, as they often do, the men change partners as if to win each in turn; but never constant, they are always being drawn back to the first, again to be tempted into a fresh desertion.

Somewhere in the island the tarantella may be the lewd pantomime dance of suggestion and provocation that one has heard about, but seen in many places over Sicily it appeared to be a true country dance of a land that is southern and a people who have a strong sense of artistry and an instinctive understanding of rhythm given them at birth.

We sat in our shade and watched. The five men of the treading vat had rolled down their trousers with the exception of one who danced with his bare feet and legs stained with juice; a big paunched, hearty Bacchus, powerfully short of body and long of arm. Alfeo played tirelessly the simple dance theme that is repeated over and over with changing flourishes to ornament it from time to time. The principal dancers were young Giuseppe, the admired, an older *contadina*, a woman who was delightfully light on her stocking-clad feet, a barefooted girl from over the hills toward Melia, the

Bacchus of the treading vat and Francesco, the harassing and the harassed foreman, he of the flailing fennel staff, the slave driver, the butt of ribaldry, now become the agile dancer on the terrace. They seemed to dance against the sky, for behind them was only the low wall that protected the terrace from the drop to the rocks below. In the sky a single cloud hung all but motionless.

After a half hour Francesco fell out and spoke to the *fattore* who looked towards the Signore, receiving an answering nod and, at his sign, the music stopped. Work must begin. Work? The forty women and girls and the few men went off singing. We sat with a fresh cigarette and another cup of coffee, but we could hear them as they filed down to the lower terraces behind the house, high voices, gay voices, for the *vendemmia* is like that.

A few verses of a longer song they sometimes sing do not lose quite all by a makeshift translation:

O little bunch of grapes,
O sweet, sweet, sweet!
O love! now I pluck thee
and like a little snail
I suck, suck, suck thee!
Llara—Llara—Lii—

I am a wagtail,
I am a sparrow,
I flutter and nip and dart.
Song! Drunk with song is my heart.
Llara—Llara—Laa.

O dear young maiden,
like the honey sweet grapes!

who plucks thee, presses thee,
eats thee . . . dies!
Yet dying thus is a pleasant fate,
a pleasant, pleasant fate!

Who plucks thee, presses thee,
eats thee . . .
no longer cares what comes!
no longer cares what he does!

When the last grapes had been gathered into the baskets, double handfuls of the vine leaves were stripped from the stalks and held ready. A circle was formed; Alfeo played his loudest and liveliest, and at a signal there was a great exultant shout and the leaves were tossed in the air to fall down over the heads of the pickers. "It is finished!" they cried. "The *vendemmia* is finished! Good luck! Good luck! Addio!"

Kitchen Carnival

XI

TO write of food and wine is to write of many good things of the earth and its people—cooks, friends around a wide table and talk, a sandwich eaten on a mountain top, salad and fruit and white wine on a beach after mid-day bathing, morning coffee on a terrace in the sun, midnight raids into the kitchen, hard bread and heady *vina nero* in a *contadino's* cottage and, not least, other people's dinners, their food and wine, their cooks and their friends. Food that is only nourishment is as uninspiring as a beef tablet, but food with a bit of the sea, of a friend, of the cook himself thrown in, then becomes proper food for man, the very staff of life.

Sicilian food and wine is hardly to be separated in our minds from the many good Sicilian things that went along with it day by day, morning, noon and night, in or out of doors during those pleasantly wayward island days. But most of all it was, as it should have been, closely associated with Nicola who, more often than not, cooked it, placed it in front of us, and persistently, tirelessly, bade us eat, only eat! And through her we think of her people; the young shepherd who brought wild asparagus, the gaunt old woman from Ziretto with black figs, the romantic, dark fellow who came with wild duck strung along his bamboo pole,

Bacchus and his wine-cart, the black bread of Donna Carmella, the mid-wife of Mola.

But more than all else it was this particular *contadina* of ours we will remember, who entered the door of a January morning and immediately took possession of far more than stove, pots and pans, brooms and soap and water. She stood on the threshold and looked at us out of her kindly, shrewd, country eyes with a direct, appraising scrutiny and from that moment her mind was made up; a mind not changed by words or even prayers. What she had decided we were never sure. That she promptly set down our ages as, say ten and twelve, was evident enough. She smiled and nodded as we stood like two children before an unfamiliar aunt we had come to visit, whom we feared a little, but hoped would like us enough to let us play in her splendid garden and give us jam with our tea. Yet it was the sort of smiling approval that said also, "Mind now, no foolishness or straight off you go!" And we wanted very much to stay in Sicily and in this particular house that held off Taormina by a goat path and that stood above terraces of almond trees that in a month would blossom, that faced eastward to Calabria, lying out over the sea, less ponderable land than an opalescent dream; a house that D. H. Lawrence, who had happened to live in it, wrote of as being on the "dawn coast of the world."

"No foolishness, mind." We were fed and put to bed, we were awakened for morning coffee, we were called sternly to luncheon and protected from the Sicilian wiles of Nicola's own countrymen, even her

own friends, and patiently instructed and, for our own good, of course, bluntly reprimanded and all but scrubbed behind the ears.

All this was splendid. More difficult was Nicola's unrelenting opinion that her charges were a poor, half-starved pair, who had never been fed the proper food, nor enough of it, nor urged to eat with sufficient authority of voice and manner (feet square, arms akimbo)—urged in the same manner that in Sicily a laggard ass is propelled up a steep path; that is, with blows and tears, with wiles, with threats and insults as the occasion seems to demand. This might still have been not an unmixed difficulty if her ideas of the capacity of the human frame had been less that of a mythical husband she had cause to refer to frequently, a man who was built, we firmly believed, like the legendary Cyclops himself. This impossible giant's appetite was her only measure of what ours should be; and not a spoonful less.

It happens that Sicilian food was evolved for an island of hungry men, who feel for their food in an enthusiastic and passionate manner, for they eat as they love and hate, with body and soul, lustily. About all of these activities of his life the Sicilian is quick, noisy, and he cares not who knows it. He has created a hundred or more manners of preparing his beloved *pasta* and although he may appear at first sight to "shovel it down" like any animal and with no more thought than to effect the disappearance of a kilo's weight in a minimum of minutes, ask him a simple question about seasoning or methods of cooking, of quality and garnish-

ments, and he becomes the true dilettante, the critic, the one who knows. Serve him "just pasta" and he will eat it, but give him a *capolavoro* of *maccherone con melanzane al forno* and he will forget the world and float up to some high heaven of delight.

It was our sheer good fortune that Nicola could neither read nor write. Cook books, which are to food as grammars are to a foreign tongue, soulless and inhuman and dead, had never been able to corrupt her culinary mind. She had, she informed us proudly, learned to cook English things, and we shuddered until we found that her non-Sicilian repertory began with tea scones, called by her *sconsi*, and quickly passed on to and as suddenly ended with, raisin cake. We applauded these admirable, if exotic, accomplishments and said we liked Sicilian cooking best. She could not read nor write, it is true, but she could talk,—this single word does not convey much—and immediately on this first morning our education began. It never ended. We heard of all the ways of cooking all the countless meats and fish and poultry and vegetables that this luxurious island affords, not to mention *pasta!* We did not understand very much of it; we did not listen; we left her for another part of the house. It was then that we learned that in Sicily cooking is vocal as time proved many other island matters to be. With a fine, all-inclusive gesture we had said, "We like Sicilian foods. Give us what you eat yourself." It was a free and flexible order, we would wait and see. Ah! It was not that simple. Nicola began naming dishes and explaining them with high gusto. Fish! The sea down

below was full of them—*Sardi, triglie, angeletti, aghilli, prezantoni, pruppi, pesce spada*—all in their season, all susceptible of being placed before us in diverse ways which were explained in close detail. *Carne!* Meat was a slightly more difficult and intricate affair. Vegetables! The earth was dense with them. Fruit! Cheeses! And wine! So we learned a second lesson, namely, that in Sicily one must first get the food before one cooks or eats it and one does not go to a telephone with a list which is read rapidly to a Mr. Jones, who is conveniently grocer—fruiterer—butcher—fish merchant—wine-seller combined and, having hung up the receiver, dismiss the matter knowing that a boy will arrive with a basket. Here the basket was hooked over one's arm (or Nicola's) and the adventure began.

The fishermen came up from the shore at various times of the morning and at no fixed hours, or at no time at all, or they sold their catch to the pensiones, or it was stormy and they had only a miserable basket left over from the day before. Butchers killed on such and such days—if they happened to buy a pair of goats or a veal or a beef animal, and if not, their shop was closed and they were enjoying themselves after the manner of Sicilian butchers, their aprons thrown aside. Vegetables came in carts, on donkeys, on heads, and wandered about the streets at random. They had to be stalked, but one picked up a tip, a rumor that such a man—tall, a black moustache, a blue shawl about his shoulders—had excellent cauliflower, or a boy and a donkey conveyed exquisite broccoli, but only so little was left! Where was he? Last seen in front of Santa

Caterina. Apples? A mysterious man with a limp was elusive, non-existent. The woman who kept the stationery store swore that she had bought this splendid fruit not ten minutes ago, and cheap they were, too. There was a girl somewhere with *finocchi*, and tomatoes were truly *bellissimi* this morning if just the right vendor could be found.

Prices were a complexity that a *forestiere* never masters, and bargaining was advanced psychology and higher philosophy with a little calculus and a great deal of savage repartee thrown in.

No, we did not dismiss from our minds with our lordly gesture the details concerning the food we were going to eat at seven-thirty that evening. While Nicola was wholly capable of coping with all the difficulties of the matter, it never for a moment occurred to her that all this was not of vital importance and interest to us as well. We were told dramatically where, and after what adventures, she had found the early wild strawberries; what she said to the man who had them, his replies, her counter thrusts, ending finally in the battle of voices and wits which concluded the purchase at such and such a price! Was it not our money? Was it not we who would eat them that evening after they had been covered with sugar and soaked in white wine? When they were put before us and we had tasted them, so cool and fresh, sweet yet zestful with the liquor—Ah! we said softly—Nicola, who stood waiting for just this, considered it the fitting and perfect end of her long efforts, every smallest step of which was im-

portant as building up to this climax. We liked them, she saw. She smiled.

In every Italian kitchen from Rome south, *pasta*, or maccaroni in some of its forms, is king—*fettucine* in Rome itself, *vermicelli* in Naples and in Sicily the larger maccaroni in whatever way it is prepared. Yet these stand second to bread, to the bread and wine which is the very life of this people, the fundamentals of their food however elaborate or however meagre. Throughout all the country districts, after bread and wine and before *pasta* even, stands *minestrone*, the soup which in its simplest terms is boiled greens from the fields—"all day gathering them, all night cooking them; eaten in a gulp," and, in a more edible form, is cabbage and onion, first fried slightly and then boiled with rice and bits of ham or other meat, and served with as little liquid as possible. For the great mass of people the daily plate of *pasta* is that distressing, barely-cooked product mixed with tomato paste that stains the country red when it is made and dried during the summer by countless tons in every street. Vegetables—cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, finocchi—these come next, while cheese is added to the usual fare and fish is eaten much less often and meat only on rare occasions; perhaps a bit of smoked sausage as a delicacy, or a stew of entrails and worse.

But to return to pleasanter matters, I have written that Italian food requires an adventurous, not too dainty and precious a palate, and curiosity is needed as well. It is not for the timid nor the bigoted, which is to name two kinds of eaters, for whom food is mere fodder

in any event. Sicilian cooking is rather a culinary festa, and anything may happen, but never, as long as the island grows garlic, herbs, peppers, olives and spices, will it be flat and dull. What is there that is typical of the island? Perhaps *maccaroni con sarde;* chopped sardines with a piquant sauce of anchovies, fennel, pine kernels and what not, poured on top of the maccaroni. Hardly less Sicilian, *maccaroni con melanzane;* either *semplice,* when the eggplant is cooked in a tomato sauce to which cheese has been added and then served separately to be put on the maccaroni as one wishes, or better, *al forno,* when the vegetable and its sauce is put in layers through the dish and the whole baked brown in the oven. Almost invariably grated parmesan cheese is served and sprinkled in quantity over the top. Maccaroni with peas may or may not be typical of the island, although it is regarded highly. The favorite *pasta* with a rich sauce of *funghi,* the small mushroom, is eaten throughout Italy.

I am of the opinion that the technique of eating *pasta* is an art far too complex, too closely national, to learn or to describe. Whether to attempt to wrap it about a fork, whether to bite off that which refused to enter the mouth, or to exert suction—and this last is the accepted method; these are difficult considerations. Cutting it into convenient lengths is supposed to be the most violent insult that one can pay to this national food, a sacrilege almost equivalent to stamping on the Italian flag. The unpractised or the shy or the too well-brought-up foreigner must manage as best he can, although it may be some relief to know that

however noisy and, shall I say, sloppy, he is in his clumsy attempts to eat maccaroni in the fashion of the land, the Sicilians or the Italians about him will never hear or notice it if they are eating as well.

The eggplant is, perhaps, to Sicily, what the artichoke is to the Italy of Rome, much esteemed and excellent in almost any way it is prepared. But *Carciofili rimpieni*—artichokes, the leaves of which have been spread open and filled with a savory mixture of bread crumbs, garlic, parsley and whatever else may be at hand, and cooked slowly with oil in a covered pan is, I think, a dish as wholly Sicilian as it is very splendid indeed; perhaps one of the best of all. Hardly second to this is *cavalofiore fritto*, which is cauliflower boiled a little first, then dipped in bread crumbs or a flour batter and fried in oil. Broccoli is always put into a pan and fried a little—not brown, of course,—before it is served. In fact, all greens are prepared this way in the southern Italian kitchens and very good they are, free of water, well seasoned and not, if the cook is a good one, soaked in the oil, but only very faintly flavored by it. The usual criticism of Italian cooking, that it is too much oil and too much fried, is only relatively true, for while a poor *trattoria* will give you nasty, oily messes, hardly edible, so will any careless kitchen hand in any country do the equivalent each in his own ignorant way. The depressing boiled food of England and the greasy, over-fried stuff of America is simply bad cooking and to be avoided if one can escape it, in Massachusetts as in Wales or Normandy or wherever else it is found.

There is no doubt that the sardine is Sicily's characteristic fish and *beccafico* the typical way of serving it. The fish is opened and flattened out like a small flounder and spread with a paste of egg and bread crumbs, parsley, cheese, salt and pepper and then, when a second sardine has been pressed on top, the whole is fried. Or they are soaked in vinegar and dipped in bread crumbs. The fried tentacles of small octopus are thoroughly Italian and, although the tunny fishing on parts of the Sicilian coast is an important industry, this fish also is not distinctive of the island. The small, golden red *triglie* are excellent and anchovies are good, but *angeletti* or flying fish, called, properly enough, "angels," and *aghilli* or needle fish are only ordinary fare. The spearing of these last two fish from the bow of a boat on a warm midsummer's night as they are brought within reach by a powerful light, is as fascinating a sport as it is beautiful; the great depth of green luminous water, the darting silver streaks of the *aghilli* or the leaping "angels" that are only a flash of opalescence as they go by.

Obviously, there are many other varieties of fish in these southern waters although to us from the north they will all seem lacking in a certain flavor, a certain fineness of taste that cooler oceans give.

Foreigners hesitate over eating goat meat, when they happen to know that it is this, and not lamb, as it is generally called, and just why they recoil I cannot tell, except for the very sound reason that it is not particularly good. Yet in Rome where lamb is the great dish, this *capretto* is considered superior. The truth is

that all meat in Sicily is apt to be uninteresting, and it is only north in Italy that beef begins to be what we of England and America demand. Completely Sicilian, however, is *falsamagra.* This meat roll is made by spreading over a large, flat slice, called *spacciatura,* a paste made of bread crumbs, oil, lard, grated cheese, onions, parsley and other seasoning, bits of ham and slices of hard boiled egg, and on top of this bacon and cheese. Rolled as tightly as may be and tied, it is cooked on top of the stove in a covered dish.

I shall attempt to mention only a few of these Sicilian foods of Nicola's, leaving out such a common product as *riccoto;* the fresh goat's milk cheese, chickens —which are always a staple of Italian diet, squabs, the wild duck that were brought all winter to our door, rabbit and other small game, the fruits and the pastry for which Palermo is almost as famous as Naples. I cannot leave the Sicilian kitchen without mentioning an omelet which, in my personal opinion, was without equal or peer; an omelet made with the wild asparagus that the goatherd brought us from time to time in early spring. This youth who drove his fifty animals past our door each morning came home one evening with a small bunch of these fine green stalks that he had gathered on the hillsides where his goats grazed. Nicola's keen eye saw what he carried and, by fair means or foul, they were transferred to our larder. A week later I saw him with a much larger bunch. I asked if I could buy it and he said a hesitant "yes." I demanded the price. He thought for an instant and said that it would be five lire. I offered three, which was ridiculously little

and, surprisingly enough, he accepted it. *Forestiere* that I was, I relented and gave him four as an encouragement to gather more for us. That same evening both this boy and I saw a few poor, meagre bunches in a village shop marked twelve lire. I suppose he saw them, for the next day he knocked at our door and of Nicola, who opened it, he demanded an extra six lire for the asparagus I had bought and we had eaten. Nicola laughed at him. Why, she asked, had he said three lire and why had he been willing to take four? Because, he explained, yesterday he had drunk too much wine and he hadn't known what he did. Now, sober, he wanted the difference. The door was slammed in his face.

Often this shepherd brought more of the delicate, a little bitter herb (there was some agreed selling price), which, boiled and then laid between the folds of an omelet, created the unquestioned *capolavoro* of our Sicilian foods. Of course it is not Sicilian after all, but this is quite beside the point.

I have left to the last, when perhaps it should have come first, the important subject: wines. What Sicilian food without Sicilian wine would be I do not know and, fortunately, I will never have to find out. When Sicily is "prohibition," as we have learned to say, I will not be eating *falsamagra* nor *maccaroni con sarde* and so speculation is rather beside the point. For the present the wines of the island are flowing with their accustomed force, a torrential freedom it may be thought, as if to compensate for the aridity of the land.

Soon after our arrival we had been walking on Monte

Venere and, descending late, we stopped at a peasant's house to ask for a drink. There we met for the first time the mid-wife, Donna Carmella, a woman perhaps sixty years of age, large framed, grey haired, but still young and friendly and, not so usual in the island, mistress of her house, her hillside property and her smaller husband as well. It was dusk. Could we have something to eat? "An egg?" Donna Carmella asked, or, she added, we could have part of the greens ready for their own supper and—of course, bread and wine.

This would be perfect, we told her. In the back room where the mattress was turned back from the board-covered trestles of the wide bed, where old chests stood to hold linen, clothing and flour, and where a crucifix and dried beans and figs and tomatoes were hung against the grey plaster wall, the husband brought an oil lamp, laid a table, and we sat down. Both of them served us. To the eggs, fried in a pan, they added sardines and to the greens, *finocchi* by way of salad, and with the bread baked that morning in the good woman's oven out of grain grown on her terraces, they gave us cheese, and then figs and nuts and raisins followed, and at the beginning, in the middle and at the end—wine; their own wine drawn into their best decanter out of the wood itself. We were hungry and why not? We were thirsty and that was not strange. We ate and then sat and talked and were shown the family linen that Donna Carmella had woven on her own loom. We discussed this and that, and we cracked nuts and ate another fig and poured out a little more wine.

Outside of the small cottage that stood on the

mountain side it was dark and windy and, being January, it was cold. Over the pleasantly-littered table the lamp spread its soft yellow light. Our chairs were tipped back. We smoked another cigarette as we talked about last year's vintage. We had a pocket flashlight to see us home and no desire to disturb our full-bodied ease and leave the warmth of the room. But finally we did start, refusing the aid of the husband who was disturbed about our going alone. Yes, we already knew that Sicilian country wine was a potent drink. Our flash provided its small circle of white light and into it we walked bravely and as certainly as we could, but we had forgotten all these rolling rocks, the sharply descending, zig-zag path and these sudden steps and those startling drops into what seemed a void of darkness at the bottom of which we imagined the sea swirled against the cliff; and over this mule path we were impelled by our excellent spirits to skip as carelessly as any two goats, to leap, to slide and think it quite splendid fun. We reached the bottom. Alive? Unharmed. Such a way with man has a little Sicilian wine.

More seriously, for this is a serious book, it is only the wine of Marsala that is really famous; the sherry-like, amber vintage that goes to England and that native islanders rarely drink. There is also the sweet Moscato of both Syracuse and the island of Pantelleria and the so-called *Vino d'Etna,* which means only that it is grown on the volcano's eastern slope, and, as it varies greatly, one can never be sure that, after ordering a bottle, it will be good, or "just wine." The *Zucco* of Palermo is very strong, and it seemed to us more like a

liqueur when we drank it one noon. In fact, the common criticism of all of Sicily's wine is this same objection to its high alcoholic content and its too full and rich flavor. Except for this fact, it is not very different in type from the better known lighter wines of the Naples district; the dry, topac Capri and the famous *Lacrima Christi* of Vesuvius.

Our own table wine, amber tinted, lighter than most, and a *rosso* that was full to the brim of a fruity, country tang, came from no less a personage than Bacchus himself. We asked on our arrival about wines and we were told that Bacchus had the best. Bacchus. No other, to be sure! We would find him and his cart of *barili* any morning along the Corso; we could not mistake him, it was said. Perhaps he had another name but no one knew it. He was quite as recognizable as we had been told, a huge man cast in the mould of a round ample barrel, who smiled broadly as he walked beside his load, a round load of small wine casks drawn by a round, sleek mule. Mr. Bacchus? He admitted it with a deep bow and a wide smile. We ordered a modest supply of his wares. "*Baccio le mani*"—I kiss your hands—was his inevitable word at parting.

Sometimes we went on walks back into the hills, circling the peak of Monte Venere and making our way up a deep valley until it became only a slight depression in the rocks and sparse bracken of the mountain side and then we took a bit of luncheon along to lend occasion to the rest at midday, or to a friendly glass of wine that we paid for with a cigarette and news of the world. The first time we asked Nicola to

make a sandwich for each of our two pockets she questioned, "You will not return to eat here *in casa*?"

We said not.

"But—"

We were firm. No, we would not return until dark. When we were ready to leave, she brought us a basket, a stout and capacious wicker basket, and in it was:—

One kilo of bread.
One cube of butter.
Eight sardines.
Four rice cakes.
One head of lettuce.
One jar of salad dressing.
One triangle of cheese.
One half a loaf of cake.
Four apples.
A handful of dried figs.
Nuts.
One litre of wine.

Yes, in Sicily, when one eats—one eats. "A sandwichie!" the good Nicola cried derisively against our protests.

The Madonna of the Hills

XII

NOTHING more spiritual than another kind of food for us to eat—in plain words, roast goat lay in Nicola's mind when she first suggested we go to this festa. Yet it was more complex than it seemed, for later she asked to be allowed to have the day free to go there herself. She must go, she said, to the Madonna della Catena. She had not missed a year since she had been cured of an old illness. But now there happened to be a knee; an ailing knee that we knew a great deal about, for we had a report, a very complete and intimate report on its condition each morning at breakfast. We had even looked at it, noting as we were bid to do, its constantly increasing size, its significant color, its threatening stiffness. Therefore we objected to this particular festa. "But how," we cried, "can you go?" "How," we demanded, "can you walk?" We said that it was impossible, that it was madness.

Nicola answered simply and resignedly that go she must and walk she must. We protested. Her religion was her own affair, but her knee, considered in terms of the food she gave us to eat, the cleaning and the errands and a watchfulness over our daily lives, was very much our affair. We suggested that she ride. No; with votive candle in her hand she must make the pilgrimage on foot. We thought of the six or eight miles. It would

be the end of our Nicola, and with Nicola taken away from us Sicily seemed not a possible place to live in and to cope with from day to day. We were impressed with the cruel wrongness of a religion that required our servant to walk to the Madonna. We formed an immediate and outspoken dislike for the entire Catholic Church. It was cruel, we said, a relic of the dark ages and a great bother.

"But you will also go to the festa," she cheerfully assured us. "You will go for the procession at dusk and you will stay the night. They roast whole goats in earthen ovens, and there are great bonfires and you will hear singing. How they dance! Besides, when it is dark, the path that is truly *cattivissimo*—very, very bad indeed, cannot be taken and one must wait for dawn."

"Yes, but for you and your knee—" we began once more.

"It is not like a festa in a town," she ignored us. "It is like the olden festas, and it is something for you to see," said Nicola, who, without the knowledge to read or write, was not without wiles and not without an understanding of us, her humble employers. Nicola left, as she had planned, in mid-morning after we had been given our breakfast. We started for the festa in the early afternoon.

I do not know the history of the Madonna della Catena. Country people will always say, "*Sisignore;* she is very old—*antichissima.*" But how old? One hundred, three hundred years? "Oh, yes, very old. *Antichissima!*" And with the same words they will indicate

a Greek temple or a house where Garibaldi was said to have once stayed. No more do I know why the church of the Madonna was built two miles up a narrow, sharply-climbing river valley from the twin hamlets of Melia and Mongiuffi, themselves all but lost in Sicilian mountains that crowd the northern angle of the island and thrust themselves in rocky headlands against this Mediterranean coast. A vision, of course, a miracle certainly, urged the building of her isolated sanctuary where, at her festa in each early September, a few hundred worshippers come up the rocky, twisting river-bed and up the most primitive of donkey tracks from the highroad by the sea, and come over the hills from Limina and Graniti, to spend a night at her shrine.

There seemed to be no marked path; one found one's own way up the dry bed of the stream. Now and again the tops of the high peaks of the mountain chain we were entering showed above us in the late sun, a close tangle of bare, austere heights of the most inaccessible of Sicily's inland country, snow-capped in winter like Etna herself, without roads and sparsely settled, a country of primitive people cut off from the civilization that in the towns and cities circles Sicily with the sea. We felt that already we had left the shore very far behind. The few people who were in sight were silent, walking single file over the narrowing path of the stream. Around each bend the contracting wall threatened to raise a new barrier. There were no terraces, no signs of cultivation on the treeless slopes that were eroded and scarred by slides of earth and from which all green had been burned away by the summer

sun, leaving only the dull color of an occasional cactus thicket.

After an hour of slow walking a flat explosion reached us and stopped us. Ah! it was a festa then. The sign was sure and unmistakable. These other men and women we had walked with had not quite reassured us, but the bomb exploded our doubts. A festa then. A voice called from the hillside above, and the whole country immediately became alive and populous again; the Sicily of human kind, the Sicily we knew. Someone called back and echoes filled the valley and mingled with louder bombs, and then a hidden band began to play.

The valley opened suddenly at a grove of tall poplar trees; a pastoral, pagan grove of sheltering foliage where goats in midday would come for cover and where a shepherd might take out his wooden pipes to play to them from his rock, flecked over with sun. In summer —it is only in these deep valleys that the green of spring can resist the sun's intolerable burning fire—the streams become only a weaving, uncertain trickle of moisture, yet here grass can keep its verdure and vermilion oleanders flower, and these trees grow tall. They are always well hidden, these valleys, secretive and shy, and they must be approached by going down from rock and barrenness with the feeling that one trespasses, that they were not meant to be found and entered. Here would be dryads hidden, and nymphs of the mountain and stream. But now it was a camping place where asses had been unloaded, blankets spread for the night and a few fires of twigs kindled. The

A Festival in the Mountains

smoke of these small blazes, blue and aromatic, waved up and clung among the branches overhead. Whole families sat about in a circle, neighbours visited and gossiped, and children played games together among the rocks and dodged around the straight trunks of the trees. A brilliant yellow dress, a green skirt, a blue head handkerchief was vivid and gay in the deepening shadows.

On the right, above the grove where the slope relented a little so that it could be climbed, among more rocks and a confusion of levels, was the festa itself, scattered crowd, band, booths of merchandise, cries of vendors, tethered donkeys—no carts here—long tables placed under rude bough shelters, the smoking ovens that Nicola had promised us, and the diminutive church of grey rubble-stone, built so closely into the bank among the rocks that it seemed to have happened there as though it had been carried down on a torrent of spring rain and melted snow and tossed up to lodge until another season and another tumult of mountain waters swept it loose again.

A church, this, and not a more than usually substantial shelter for a flock of sheep? A shrine? There were the people, this telltale band and the steady flow in and out of the narrow oblong door. It was already dusk. An ass brayed. Another bomb broke in a white puff of smoke and the sound, reflected from the sheer cliff just opposite, was deafening. A beggar held out a twisted hand. On a bit of ground only relatively level four couples of boys danced to an accordion.

It was soon dark. Candles and small fires of twigs

lit the ground and threw tortured shadows about in fine abandon. The acetylene flares in the few booths hissed menacingly, or died to a miserable pin point of blue glow. The ovens had been opened and the smell of roasted meat was in the air. A great amount of wine and bread was being sold and the satisfying business of eating and drinking was going on in a vigorous manner. Even the indefatigable dancers had paused and the accordion player was resting against the long night's labor ahead of him. Asses were thrown a wisp of straw. The children and the dogs waited patiently for the poorer fragments of meat and the bones. Well-to-do property owners sat in state under the shelters and ate with no less a smack of the lips than did the ragged family from the goat pastures over the hills.

This silent eating and the following sleepy quiet was broken by the abrupt rattle of a drum and shadowy forms moved at its command, the band gulped its last glass of wine—they had not denied themselves it was plain—the sellers of candles were raided, the merchants stirred to their business, a triple bomb awoke the soundest sleeper and a whistling rocket that fell in a shower of gold promised the splendor that was to come. The procession quickly formed at the door of the church.

The shrewd old Nicola was right; it was no ordinary festa. Our impressions of it had constantly changed as we came up the lonely river valley to the pagan grove and the happy, bucolic scene of music and dancing, the improvised shelters of boughs and the roasting food. Then night shut us in more securely than the hills, and there were wavering, fantastic lights, the

muted, distant sound of the accordions, the dancing figures raised in high shadows against poplar foliage, and now we watched the first glimpse of the candles carried in the procession.

A dozen young country girls in white dresses and veils bore their white satin banner of the Immacolata between two guarding files of older women. They were followed by priests in silver and white vestments, and after them came the *vara* that ten men carried on their shoulders. On this throne sat the scarlet and gold-draped Virgin of the Chain, her slender neck hung with jewels, her small hands folded on flowers of silver and her dark hair crowned with a circle of gold. She sat under a draped canopy of scarlet brocade as graciously poised as any young queen. A hundred candles were luminous about her, casting up to her oval face a soft radiance. The band that followed was playing in its liveliest manner. *Vivas* were shouted, but it was enthusiasm without fanaticism and it was gaiety without the intolerable strain of tightened throats. She was young and lovely down there among the trees. They lit all these yellow candles for her and they carried her to the music of a resplendent band. They had come long distances dressed in their holiday best to honor her, and had they not eaten well of *capro,* roasted over live coals, and drunk refreshingly, even deeply, of the rich wine of their country, and would they not dance the night through in Her name?

The procession was slow moving, not, it seemed, because the ground was impossibly sloping and uneven and their path obstructed, nor that the sacred image

commanded a solemn pace, but because they chose to linger in this pleasantly wayward fashion, taking their fill of her bright beauty, her jewels, and the flowing stream of radiance that they, themselves, made through the summer dark. We thought of Venice and the *cinquecento*, of a Versailles of Louis the Grand. The girls in white paused, chatting and laughing until the royal *vara* could catch up with them, and the old women who turned to watch critically the progress of the Madonna up the slope, were diverted by the ascending whine of a rocket that broke into another falling canopy of linked emerald darts. Overhead the stars themselves were brilliant and the breath of wind set up a fresh rustling like rain in the tops of the trees.

Thus they carried Her who had once chosen to appear to a shepherd lad on this very spot—or so we imagined it to be. The boy, frightened and marvelling, had run to tell the townsfolk and they had hurried up the stream and, as was fitting, carried her back to their church; this image of a girl divinely crowned. But the fine church at Mongiuffi, its heavy, confining walls, the crowd that knelt before her, irked and disturbed the young Madonna of the river valley, of the goat pastures. When at last they ceased their clamorous worship and left the church thick with incense and smoke, and locked the door to keep her from harm, she stole out and through the village and flew with light swiftness, for she was country born, over the rocks and between the trees and at last she was home again, the hills about her, the friendly river running at her feet. But her worshippers tracked her and carried her back.

Fearing what they could not say, they bade the sacristan this time doubly lock the heavy wooden doors, and it was done. But again she fled her prison, and again they went in larger numbers and triumphantly bore her home. Six times this happened in that distant August before it penetrated their heavy skulls that this thing the shepherd boy had found was no village-dweller and that while they had given her shelter and protection, their gifts of candles and incense, fine vestment and jewels and a first place on their altar, something of all this—they shook their heads in sad perplexity—displeased her, even frightened her. Six times! They were dumbfounded. Yet naturally they wished to keep with them this being who was clearly miraculous, not to say valuable, for they saw that her presence would shed no little glory on their town, and even material gain. Moreover, she was theirs. They were not the ones to let property slip out of their hands. Had they not discovered her? So once more they fetched her down the valley as they would have brought home a stray sheep, and enthroned her in proper state with reverent prayers and all manner of trappings which would impress her with their veneration. But she shed the vestments on the worn tiles of the church; these brocades and jewels and symbols, crown and all, and in the morning they found them carelessly scattered where she had disrobed.

So they went, men, women and children—for no gaffer was too old to hobble along and no infant was too young to be carried—with oxen and donkeys and tools and the priests: the well and the ill, the high and the low, and they built the tiny stone church in the iso-

late valley. Then the Madonna was happy and she performed many miracles and answered many trivial prayers. When they returned each year on the date of her first discovery, she allowed them to share her own happiness and she gave to them, it seemed to us who were watching, something of her own old delight at being free from houses and all manner of stupid confinements of body and spirit both. Had not she shown them her love for simple, full-flavored country things?

We thought of all this as the procession went past us to enter the church again and we were sorry that they had not been even slower in their short turn about the open space; sorry that she must be hidden away inside so soon. After all, it was only once a year. They might have allowed her to stay outside with a circle of bonfires built up about her and the night of music, of dancing, of eating and drinking in her eyes. She would have understood it perfectly; the need for it, the joy of it. But no, they must revert to the stupidity of their forebears; she was holy, she was valuable—*ecco!* shut her in.

The disappearance of the image took away from the festa much of its grace, for immediately the charming impromptu air became heavy. Old people were suddenly tired and children dropped where they stood and were dragged away to bed. The dancing was begun again within two rings of spectators conveniently near the booths where the *barili* of wine were piled. As in all country places in Sicily, no women danced; the men were partnered only with each other. It was rapid and violent and heavy-footed, this dancing on the packed earth that was the floor; a whirling, stamping, sweating

business of bodies compressed into too small a space, colliding heavily without apology, pausing only reluctantly to pay another couple of *soldi* and begin again. The tables in front of the stacked barrels were crowded. People still wandered aimlessly past the booths of merchandise, of sweet biscuits and rock-hard candies, but without buying. The *contadino* lifted out of himself for those few moments of the luminous procession, fell back to the ponderous business of sleep, or fell to drinking from half-liter glass mugs or eating the cold remains of his roasted goat. He continued to drink and to argue, even to fight. Meat continued to be thrust into the ovens. Candles were burned out and only the hard glare of the flares remained. Men and women disappeared together into the outer darkness. A thick-voiced song was started and a pale youth entertained a group with a lewd improvisation in dialect. The dancers sweat.

The country festa had become country saturnalia, not very amusing, certainly not gay. An hour past midnight it was cold and we wrapped inadequate light coats about us and propped ourselves against a sloping rock. There was no moon and we waited for dawn and enough light to see our way down to Mongiuffi and home. Our neighbor, Carmello the goatherd, and his son were to be our companions. Men slept with their heads fallen forward on the wine-stained tables. The carabinieri brought order out of the momentary loud-voiced chaos of one of the dancing groups and the accordion played on. Finally we could tell that asses were being saddled and families collected and there was the good aroma of morning coffee being brewed over a bit of fire kindled

between two flat stones. At last we could see faintly the opposite hillside and at the same time a drum rattled, people turned, sleepers awoke, a young priest appeared at the church doorway. It was the call to Mass.

It was our signal also. Carmello waved an arm towards the river—"*Andiamo!*" he cried,—let us go!

Around the Island

XIII

THE traveller, I am sure, takes great joy in an island, not a huge island that is a continent, but a true island that he can go around for, once circled completely, it is his; he feels that nothing has been denied him, as if he had held this fragment of the earth's surface intimately in his two hands.

I do not know how many miles is the perimeter of the Sicilian triangle. By our own inexact measurement it was two weeks of time. An aeroplane could fly it in a short day, an automobile—but by third class Sicilian train one must be generous, for there enters the most pleasant and stimulating of factors, those of pure chance and uncertainty. One does not follow the coast of Sicily as one is projected by *treno diretto* from Paris to Rome, and this not only because of the uncertainty of Sicilian engines and Sicilian timepieces, but rather because of a pleasant, human inexactness in the traveller himself. Besides, one starts to circle Sicily as one would start to round Africa; that is, with proper preparation, farewells, and a sense of daring. Affairs are put in order, wills are made, the house is finally closed and the servant, who will be notified of the distant return, waves one down the path with evident good wishes but with little hope of ever seeing her employers again.

Indeed, to Nicola, who watched us out of sight, we

were as daring as if we left for the North Pole; perhaps more demented than brave, possibly more foolish than heroic. It had never occurred to her that our casual mention of going was other than the usual fantastic talk of *forestieri,* the babbling of idle children, harmless if absurd. To be sure, people went to Messina on the train, also to Catania, and some, she would have admitted, went even to Palermo. Foreigners like ourselves and Sicilians also, went unbelievable distances across the ocean, but such a voyage, understood in a vague enough fashion, no doubt, was established in her mind and accepted, while no one, no one! she repeated, went on a two weeks' trip around the island. Her mingled astonishment and disapprobation was evident and disturbing.

For too long we had been in Nicola's hands; very capable, very friendly hands, but masterful for all that. We wanted to be allowed to go around Sicily. But where will you sleep? Palermo, yes, but in all these distant, unknown places? It would cost a great deal. We said we had money enough. But what would she, Nicola, do all the time of our absence? Have a vacation, stay at home, we replied in the confident fashion of extreme youth. This was almost too much. She spread her hands, she called on the Madonna to bear witness that it was these *forestieri* who had placed her in this peculiar position; it was not her own doing. We seized the offensive; we said, "Why not go around Sicily?" We defied anyone to stop us. "You will have a good rest," one of us declared. "It will make well your knee," the other added. We thought she murmured, "*I poverini!*" But in the end, the day and the tour were won and we were

given early breakfast, our bags were put in our hands and we were watched down the rocky path.

MESSINA

To all except the youngest of us Messina signifies earthquake, tidal wave and destruction. Perhaps during those last days of 1908 our fathers and mothers contributed money or clothing for the victims who, in the city alone, numbered 84,000 out of a population of 120,000. Today, Messina is still Sicily's third largest city, but it has never recovered from that time of death and wreckage and horror. It has one of the finest harbors in Europe, it is on main steamship routes and all who go to the island by rail are ferried from the mainland of Italy across the narrow straits to this city of wooden shacks, of wrecked buildings untouched in over twenty years and new cement structures that are said to be strong enough to stand against the doom that hangs over this corner of earth.

Founded by pirates in 732 B.C., Messina has been destroyed by man and the gods with monotonous regularity. In 1743 forty thousand died of the plague, forty years later it was almost obliterated by earthquake, while in the revolution of 1848 it was bombarded for a week and only a few years later cholera killed fifteen thousand of its people. So the sad history runs. Not only in historical times, but in legend also there seems to be a shadow, a horror close to Messina, for in the straits were Scylla and Charybdis both. "Thou couldst send an arrow across," the Odyssey tells. "And there on is a great fig tree growing in fullest leaf, and beneath it

mighty Charybdis sucks down black water, for thrice a day she spouts it forth and thrice a day she sucks it down in terrible wise. Never mayest thou be there when she sucks the water, for none might save thee from thy bane, not even the earth-shaker! But take heed and swiftly drawing nigh to Scylla's rock, drive the ship past since of a truth it is far better to mourn six of thy company in the ship than all in the selfsame hour."

If it is a city long under the menacing wing of doom, each time it seems destined to emerge, for the Moslem traveller of the twelfth century, Ibn Jubair, was impressed with its great trade and its commerce, and wrote that he saw there ships tied up along the shore like horses tied to their posts in a stable. Now again a new Messina is slowly building; uninteresting, too ringed about with the old ruins and too raw as only fresh cement can be blatantly raw.

The cathedral built by the Norman was badly damaged in 1908. Here in the year 1254, at the funeral of Conrad, son of Frederick II, the great canopy over the body was so high that the candles set upon it caught fire to the wooden roof and, burning it, the entire elaborate bier was destroyed together with the body of the prince. On the point of leaving Messina we were taken into this church that they have been reconstructing during the past few years. Soon after noon, it was filled with laborers, a maze of scaffoldings and suspended, precarious stagings, spanning bridges, supporting poles all veiled by sun-shafts from the high windows, heavy with floating dust turned to gold. Men sang from their high perches aloft (do all men working far from the ground,

sailors in rigging, a boy in a tree, sing with a glad will?) —sang in these beams that were like the heaven's radiance boldly painted into the pictures of the early Renaissance. Children carried heavy material up fantastically insecure ladders, decorators were painting the brilliant colors on the dark beams of the Normanesque ceiling, a group re-erected a restored side altar carved by the fifteenth century Sicilian master, Antonello Gagini, stone cutters were at labor in the white dust of their chisels and artisans laid sections of the floor with the fine-cut tiles that were like dull mosaics. In the midst of this work, this sun and dust and voices and singing, Messina suddenly came alive for us, and was real and vital, even heroic. It did not seem as it had outside, a futile, pathetic piling up of something that sooner or later would go down like a house of balanced cards. For a moment we realized that man can be greater than these blind earth forces that repeatedly destroy him; that he is always greater, because of his absurd, happy faith in the permanence of what his two hands create, in the deathlessness of what he leaves behind. He builds his cathedrals as he begets his sons, with a primitive ardor, a short memory and a firm faith.

We did not examine the famous letter, or rather a copy of the letter written to Saint Paul when he was in Messina by the Virgin in Jerusalem, congratulating the Messinese on their conversion. The saint translated this letter from the Hebrew into Greek and one Constantine Lascaris, in 1467, made it over into Latin. In this way the Madonna della Lettera became the city's patron and her festa, held on June third, when the epistle was

dated, is an annual celebration. It is in mid-August, on the day of the Assumption, that the great festa of their Madonna is held, one of the largest in the island. To-day it is far more secular than religious and many of the old customs have been given up. An English traveller writing sixty years ago describes quaintly enough the most important feature of it as he saw it then.

"There came an immense car, equal in height to the very tops of the houses, which totters as it is dragged along with ropes by hundreds of cattle in the shape of men. The crowds that follow are innumerable from town and country. The lower storey of this movable tower is embellished with hangings of rich silk and velvet, forming an imaginary sepulchre for the Virgin; it is filled with a band of musicians and a choir who chant solemn dirges over the body of the deceased. Twelve youths with brazen glories on their heads encircle this tomb externally, to represent the twelve apostles: around them a circular frame carries several little children attached to it, in flowing robes and painted wings, to support the character of angels. Upon the platform of the second storey stands a company of prophets chanting the Madonna's praises; and in front of the prophetical choir, a large image of the sun, revolving with a vertical motion, carries round six infants affixed to the ends of its principal rays, and styled the cherubim; six more on the other side perform similar revolutions upon a figure of the moon. The third storey is decorated with a tribe of singing patriarchs, around whom a circular frame moves with a train of seraphim. Over the heads of the patriarchal family is fixed a large sphere, painted sky-blue and figured with golden stars;

little winged infants flit about this, under the denomination of 'moving intelligences' or the 'souls of the universe': upon the sphere itself stands a damsel decked in embroidered robes glittering with spangles, in the character of the Saviour, and in her right hand stretched out and supported by machinery, she holds a beautiful child which represents the soul of the Blessed Virgin. At an appointed signal this well-freighted car begins to move, then angels, cherubim, seraphim and animated intelligences all begin to revolve in such complicated orbits as to make even the spectators giddy with the sight; but alas for the unfortunate little actors in the pantomime!"

Yet Messina keeps its flair for grandiose fantasy and still brings out for this occasion the two legendary figures, called "I Giganti." They are twenty or thirty feet tall, a man painted black to represent some conception of a dark, foreign people, perhaps the Saracens, and a woman cast in the same heroic mould who symbolizes the white native element in its people. These two giants follow the *vara* of the Virgin della Lettera when it is carried about the streets at this August fête.

What two or three days in Messina would reveal I do not know. These few pages tell what the same number of hours showed us as we drove about in a carrozza whose driver told us with pride that he had pulled himself out of the wreckage of the earthquake, more dead than alive, some twenty years ago. He offered to show us the exact spot, but we declined with thanks.

Third class by train is a cheap if vulgar way to travel, but in Sicily it is a jolly way as well. It is crowded, odor-

ous, sooty, noisy and hard-seated, and it is not recommended. This is not to say that there is no zest to be had out of a car full of animated Sicilians, fun out of a great deal of talk and, if you can take a cinder in the eye or an elbow in the ribs with a philosophy that does not exclude the balm of cursing, or the right to retaliate with a sharper elbow, then this way of island travel might be tried. You will see the country on pleasantly slow trains and certainly touch the people first hand.

More than all else, the one great barrier the foreign traveller meets, that wall built up by the fact of his inherent foreignness, is lowered a little. You do not immediately become in some mysterious manner a Sicilian, but you are less isolated as a being who is *not* a Sicilian. At least it is quite apparent to the dullest witted of the car or compartment, that you are not the usual *forestiere* lolling on the royal red plush of the first class, ensconced in the grey luxury of the second, nor yet one of those of the rushing automobile. So much is plain to them and so much do you gain. But there comes also the camaraderie of the third class which you can no more escape—and sometimes you would!—then, swimming, you can escape the fact of the water that submerges you. The friendly interest that simple, gregarious man feels for another of his kind, that the Sicilian, being what he is, feels in a degree so warm and emotional and soul-filling that he is most delighted when he is packed closest on the bench of a train, laid like a sardine in the box of an airless autobus, or jammed in

any crowd; this interest envelops even a foreigner, a stranger from another land speaking another tongue. Five hours on end in a compartment for ten which necessity has filled with a lucky thirteen, baggage included, is for him, whatever purgatory it may be for you, intoxicating joy. You are two strangers, but the eleven look at you and discover that you are human beings, assume that you are neither deaf nor dumb and immediately conclude that you will want to talk and listen, miss nothing outside of the window, drink and eat and smoke cigarettes incessantly, laugh, tell your intimate life history, wave your arms and, in short, enjoy yourself. Is not happiness the end of man's desires? Is not all this happiness in the extreme? Therefore, they cry, let us all make the most of it while we may.

The Sicilian who travels third class is not blasé even though it is his own train that carries him along and his own country he traverses, for to him a train is an enchanting novelty, a delirious excitement, a very bright new toy. It is not you who, in this strange land, are sharp-eyed, tense and observant, but this Vincenzo, going the fifty kilometri from Patti to Cefalu. He is the real adventurer, the real tourist, and he is the best of all guides, for he has both enthusiasm and knowledge and he is generous with both. His dialect will be thick like his laborer's strong, stubby fingers, but he will be a master of exact and eloquent pantomime.

Between Messina and Patti, while we were clinging to the cliffs of the Peloritan Mountains that crowd into the acute angle of the island, with the sea the throw

of an orange from our window or sometimes seen across a mile or two of densely cultivated coastal plain, we provoked a very bedlam of voice and conflicting opinion among the five men of our compartment by the casual mention that we would leave them either at a station called Oliveri, or just beyond at the larger Patti, because we were going to spend the night at the monastery of the black Madonna of Tindari. Mildly we asked advice and we received an hour of impassioned and hopelessly divergent opinion. In the first place, we could *not*, and very certainly we *could*, stay the night at Tindari. There was, it developed, an hotel, a new, a resplendent hotel, and—there was no hotel of any kind. We knew that there had been an hotel, now closed. But the monastery itself, we murmured. Ah, the *convento!* They took no one in. Yes, they took anyone in who came along. They never took women. They took only men, only Catholic men. But would it be easier, we asked when we could, to get there from Patti the largest town, or from Oliveri the nearest station? We repeated our original question. The train, we were told, this splendid express, this *direttissimo* did not stop at the mere nothing called Oliveri. But of course it did! because a cousin's friend— But why didn't we stay at Patti where there was an hotel? We had been told, we said, that it was not a good hotel, not clean. Ah! we had a reason, a relatively silent gentleman said encouragingly. We had been duped, he was immediately contradicted; we had been misled by villains who were the enemies of Sicily, anti-Fascisti, and so the topic broadened, rather it burst its too restrictive, too local bonds

like the explosion of a bomb, to include the evil mayor of some forgotten place, the profits of hotel ownership, the low price of last year's vintage, *il Duce*, the misfortunes of a wife's uncle—all illuminating and informative, all not so very helpful. But help, we knew, would come with a common catching of exhausted breaths. Yes, we could (this was stated, notwithstanding one glum and sullen dissenter) get off at Oliveri, but we would have to walk and carry our two bags up a mule path to the monastery high on its steep hill, or we could go on and find a carrozza, perhaps even a motor, to drive us back by good road. More than this, we were given the name of a friend, a shopkeeper in Patti, who would be delighted to see us and help us if he could. They were still divided, however, over the admission of a woman, even a very young woman, to the monastery of the Virgin. It was a fine point, ecclesiastical, all but metaphysical, like angels on the head of a pin. We left them to argue it out.

TINDARI

The young fellow who drove us in a dilapidated carrozza from Patti to the monastery, sat sidewise on his seat and asked innumerable questions about America and gave us, in his turn, much valuable information about this land which almost every Sicilian knows from cousins or brothers who have been there. He told us that in this land of the free and the brave, one could have as many wives as one wished—in succession, that is—while in Italy this pleasant variety was not possible. "One wife," he remarked sadly, "for always." His

uncle's cousin earned so many, a great many dollars each week in Brooklyn, or it might have been in Chicago. He then asked for a cigarette. This driver was an expert at cutting off with the long lash of his whip bits from the cactus plants, the *fichi d'India*, that grew beside the road. His aim was accurate and his careless technique deft from long practice, and we noticed that evidently it was a common sport, for hardly one of the broad fleshy palms were free from the marks of the passing cartiers.

I have written already about the Virgin of Tindari and there is little more to say of the place itself, of its dozen squalid houses, nor of the small Greek theatre whose tiers of seats were, in May, pleasantly buried in a field of grass and flowers. There are Greek walls, cactus covered, and the ruins of a Roman gymnasium and some few square yards of very freshly colored mosaic floor. If I write of these in an offhand fashion it is because very few travellers, I suppose, with Syracuse and Agrigento already seen or to be seen, would go to Tindari for these fragments alone. Beside, the monastery and its superb aerial location is so patently a finer thing, that the rest becomes inconsequential.

We stayed the night in a long, low building, all but a part of the monastery (one faction of the train compartment was right, women are not admitted) where pilgrims were given, as were we, a narrow, clean enough room and primitive conveniences. A country restaurant next door cooked us edible food at evening and morning coffee that was better than the average we had had in many small hotels. There were the agreeable shuffling

The Monastery at Tindari

priests, the archaic dark lady of miracles herself, the winding strip of garden between the high rose-colored walls of the monastery, and the drop of hundreds of feet to the yellow sand bars that swing out into the sea at the foot of the cliffs, the long curve of the coast to the promontory of Milazzo and out over the water, the Liperi Islands, the Aeolian Isles of the ancients and the cone of Stromboli, the volcano, far beyond. The ledge of flower-planted garden widens to a seat under a fig tree, narrows to a footpath between building and low-guarding wall. The sun had gone down into the sea like a lemon wafer into a slot, the islands were dim with mist and behind us the near mountains had drawn away and were flat, faintly lilac, their tops clear against a sky washed over with an afterglow of pale and impermanent rose. The priest walked with us. "You are," he inquired, "American?" Yes. "And Catholic?" he asked gently. "Ah—" he said to our negative reply. But we had come to stay a night at Tindari, we had admired his garden, his Virgin, his sweep of sea and coast, his twilight—perhaps, he seemed to conclude, it was nearly all the same.

CEFALU

A month later we drove the road from Patti to Cefalu by motor. It is also very fine by train. It seldom leaves the shore, tunnels often through headlands or swings around them beneath the cut of overhanging rocks when it can find foothold, always keeping a long stretch of northern Sicilian coast in view and, for many kilometri, the group of volcanic islands. Here the

Caronie Mountains thrust down and outward into Capo Calava and Capo d'Orlando, and inland there are primitive towns, grey and huddled against the hills. You cross almost at their mouths the wide *fiumi* which are only dry beds of rock and sand in summer, however torrential they become at the season of the rains. After San Stefano the hills recede and the rock of Cefalu is, by contrast, the more bold and uncompromising, looking like a great lowered head of land meeting the sea. It is good to be able to descry the end of a day's journey by such an impressive mark. In truth, Cefalu was an ending, for our eyes followed the land just this far and nothing could be seen beyond; plainly here one must stop. There was a commanding finality about the cape that we obeyed.

The small town lies beyond the headland, sheltered by it, the bare rock wall comfortably at its back and the protected harbor at its feet. It is a very attractive Sicilian coast village of narrow busy streets and a colorful, active port; old crowded buildings rising out of the quiet water, fishing boats drawn up on a bit of sandy beach, or tied to massive stone piers. And there is the cathedral, King Roger's first church in Sicily, built where he vowed he would raise a monument to God if he weathered storm and put foot on land. His vessel made harbor at Cefalu and the rich, honey-golden church of massive twin towers joined by interlacing blind arches, all dwarfed by the cliff it seems to be hewn out of, is proof that to God, if not always to lesser beings, including popes, the Norman was a man of his word. Church and town and harbor and rock citadel are of a piece and there

is nothing to distract from one's impression of austere age, mellowed by southern sun.

At Cefalu one feels a northern medievalism little influenced by the strange admixture of Islam and Byzantium, as if they, these northerners who built it, had not yet come into contact with the race that later worked such a spell in their lives and in their churches both. Nor did they know or care about the great Gothic cathedral-building art of their own country which they had left and forgotten, and that even then was stirring strongly through the French Communes.

In this church are the mosaics found again in Palermo although these are said to be earlier and less restored. The Byzantine Christ looks out from the curve of apse and below him the standing figures of the Virgin, the angels, the apostles, are rarely beautiful in a vigorous, double rhythm of color and form. To quote the French critic, M. Faure, who writes of Byzantine mosaics in general, "All the colors of the universe seem to be reduced to a few essential hues, deepened, intensified, through being piled up in limpid glazes and through crystallizing in space the vague harmonies that float across our minds and harass our desires." Overhead is the smoky brown of the beamed ceiling, painted with Arabic devices and miniature scenes out of Eastern life.

This cathedral seems very important, as though it might hold some pregnant message half hidden, quite apart from its immediate appeal; yet just what it speaks is never wholly plain, but broken up into parts and details that threaten to become only confusion. You walk away and pause to look back, turn from the worn, dim

interior only to be drawn inside again, think that you have gathered all of it, color and form and feeling, and yet you know that it has spoken incompletely as if in some special language of its own that, like a dialect, is never wholly clear. It is not noticeably Byzantine, although that entire strange and futile empire might be reconstructed from the prophets ranged along its walls. It is hardly at all Arabic and still there are those painted rafters that refuse to be ignored. Surely it is not Gothic, yet its façade—for a moment one almost thinks— Is it only a trick of the mind, busy at its old game of associations, or is there something about Cefalu in Sicily, a glimpse of this street, an angle of that building, that is like a smaller Norman Caen?

PALERMO

Only an hour by train from Cefalu was Palermo, capital, metropolis, first city of the island, modern nervous, delightful and Sicilian, all of it island to the core.

Five months earlier we had landed here by boat from Naples with more than half a decision to stay an indefinite week, a month, forever. It was a morning of late December, of rain; of cold, very wet rain, very gray rain from low clouds that rested heavily on Monte Pellegrino, that settled lower over housetops and down over us as well. We had come south to find Sicily and warmth, and sun and flowers, breakfasts out of doors, lazy hours in sultry shade—I have forgotten what else. With exactly nine pieces of baggage loaded on a low donkey cart, ourselves leading in a carrozza, we wan-

dered quite aimlessly over the strange city in search of, I suppose, a place less moist, less cold; certainly we did not ride about because we enjoyed the chilling day. We said often and emphatically, but doing nothing more about it, "What a horrible place," or the words might have been "hole of hell." Sicilian sunshine! We sneered and splashed along. We looked at rooms, at apartments, at entire *palazzi* for all I know, and having seen them, said to our carrozza, "Drive on!" The nine pieces of baggage meekly followed. Possibly we were waiting for Sicilian summer to begin, or for Garibaldi to arrive and expel the wicked Bourbons.

It was no act of our own volition that took us to the station and put us on a train. The cabby grew tired of wheeling us around; we annoyed him extremely, we annoyed his horse, all Palermo was very annoyed with us and finally something had to be done.

"Palermo—" in the after months an innocent would begin. "Palermo!" we would cry in the anguish of chill memory. But Palermo is not like this; only two *forestieri* happened to be like this.

Palermo is—well, Naples on a volcanic island, a little Paris gone far south. It has beauty, flavor and assurance. It once rivalled Bagdad and it half remembers it. It once had a great king and a brilliant medieval court where the Italian language was born, and all this it does not quite forget. More than these past glories, Palermo is still the capital of an integral part, a physically separate portion of the earth's surface, of a small continent, and so it carries a title it considers not inferior to that borne by Rome itself. It takes its place among the elite

of sovereign capitals—Paris and Bucharest and Madrid and London. Its pride is extravagant because that is its Sicilian nature. It is insistently not Italian, nor does it want to be, for it accepts Rome only with reservations and sneers openly at Naples across the Tyrenean sea.

Palermo has a noisy exuberance, a brittle explosive energy like the incessant snaps of the carrozza driver's whip, while beneath is a softer, more human material, a warmth of blood, even a provincial intimacy that it would like to hide. One suspects all this; one doesn't know the real nature of a city in a few tourist days. Certainly it is trying hard to be quite sophisticated and emotionless and modern in the northern sense, but it happens to be also what a few thousand years, more or less, of existence as an island in the Mediterranean has made it; fine motors and great factories and smart shops; but it was once called Balerm and had its three hundred mosques within Mohammedan walls.

It may be that Palermo would like to forget entirely this dark Islamic strain, this infidel blot on its European escutcheon, this more than drop of exotic Eastern blood, but the visitor will not forget it, exaggerating its importance perhaps, but seizing on whatever he can that will account for an insistent, almost non-European atmosphere and charm.

Of its churches I have already written. What remains? Much, I think. One need not ask pardon, I suppose, for liking the obvious, hour by hour modern city, crackling and alive, at ease and very much enjoying itself. The Via Maqueda is something more than the main street of a provincial capital and the narrow streets

of the trades—the Via Calderai of the coppersmiths, the Via Cassari of the carpenters and potters, the long street of the shoemakers and the wall of the cord winders and the whole salty, colorful harbor quarter called the Cala, are not just southern Italian, not just dim and dirty and crowded, "picturesque" and all that, but here they have a vitality and an insistent ringing tone that may be a hammer against an anvil, the voice of a saw cutting into an oak plank or a cobbler pounding flat a leather sole or the cry of ropes running through blocks as a sail is lifted and lines cast off. These are not simply those dreary streets of the poor—Palermo may have them, I do not know—but of good craftsmen that work at their own bench in their own doorway with their children about them learning the trade, their wives within call and their neighbours and friends within sight. It is said that the trades of these streets are unchanged since Arabic days, when those unexcelled Moslem workers in metals and leather sat at their benches in Palermo as they did in their own Cairo and Bagdad.

Follow the stars in the guide book if you must for, after all, they will take you to the Capella Reale, to San Giovanni, to the museum and out to Monreale, but stay to wander through another day, another week of Palermo if you can.

SEGESTA

It is a pleasant thing to defy conventions; it is a very great joy indeed to defy tourist conventions. We were told that one went to the Temple of Diana at inland Segesta by automobile, a private car, or that of Mr.

Cook. But we would go by train. We would leave at 4.57 Sunday morning, alight at a station, in fifteen minutes pick up the bus that runs daily across the western corner of Sicily to Trapani, in a half hour descend at the road that is only a ten minutes walk to the Greek temple and afterward we would walk or ride to the town of Calatafimi, spend the night there and leave again the next morning early by bus for Trapani where we would be on the coast and at the railroad again. Our hotel in Palermo said we could not do this. Why? Because it was never done. Bosh! More specifically, there would be no bus to take us from station to temple, there was no possible hotel in Calatafimi. *Forestieri,* well-behaved *forestieri,* went to Segesta from Palermo by motor and returned to Palermo at night in time for dinner at their hotel. To hell with *forestieri!* We had an *orario;* thus we had official assurance of both train and connecting bus, and we had been told about the hotel. We were superior. After several months in the island we were all but native Sicilians anyway. Besides, Mr. Samuel Butler had lived at Calatafimi, had written a part of his quaint "Authoress of the Odessy" there and both the hotel and the main street were named for him. We would make a pilgrimage in thanks for "The Way of All Flesh." Our Palermo hotel protested, shrugged, and then dismissed us as being the kind of tourists that hotels in Sicily could very well do without. There would be no milk for four A.M. coffee, which would have to be given us in thermos bottles. What difference milk in our four A.M. coffee, we said. At this the hotel did not even bother to shrug.

There was one man at the diminutive station marked Segesta, there was a road going out over the rolling hills and up the road a small house; no other human habitation in an extremely wide and silent sweep of wheat land under an early, but obviously business-like, May sun. The station official was kindly. It was Sunday and the Trapani bus did not run. No, he was sorry, but it did not run. We showed him the *orario*. Yes, but now on Sunday it did not run. There was a carriage perhaps, a cart, a mule, a donkey? He was sorry. And the famous temple? Ah! Many *forestieri* came to see it he assured us. Did he say seven kilometri? He did. It was a beautiful morning, we decided, the sun just a trifle too hot, the road a little lacking in shade. But as one does in country Sicily, we would meet a cart or an animal whose back would at least carry the bags. *Andiamo!* We were off.

At the foot of the hill that leads up to the temple where the turn from the main road is made, there, and there only, did we meet the friendly proprietor of many acres. He was thick-set, middle-aged and smiling, and we were rather warm and plainly dusty and perhaps as obviously arm-weary. We were going to the temple? We had come all the way from the station? The good man was shocked. But he would carry our two light bags on his mule and he reached for them. Habit controlled us and spoke out before we could check the brutal words—"How much will it cost?" "Nothing!" he, of course, protested. But we had made the slip and so we had to insist. "But naturally we must pay, we must—" He smiled at our confusion. "I was going up there

anyway," he explained easily. "But something," we kept on, idiotically. He was plainly embarrassed now. "Well—five lire," he said, "but I do not do it for the money." We had seen this too late.

We crossed a shallow stream and gallantly he insisted that the signora ride and, once over and across, he was firm; it was a hill, he pointed to the obvious, the sun was hot, the signora must stay on the animal. "All this is mine," he said, waving an arm about the wide farm lands. A herd of mules was grazing in the distance. We chatted pleasantly along the way. At the top before the temple itself, the signora dismounted and we thanked him elaborately, and thanks can be this in Sicily if one puts one's mind to it. Now we felt again the chagrin provoked by our first stupidity, for we must take out of pocket a very small five-lire piece and pay him. It had to be done and the money was held out.

"What is this?" he demanded.

I told him, rather making a joke of it. "Our bargain, you know."

"Five lire?" he said, in astonishment. "Twenty lire! —the signora rode!"

Sicily to the life again. We were on familiar ground. Could we deny the lady rode? We could not, but we could argue hotly and of course we could compromise and part with not unfriendly good-byes.

All this was at the door of the Temple of Segesta, Diana's great shrine. But we had learned that one takes such human interludes as this at a stride, *alla Siciliana*, so to say, and passing through, step out the other side. Our friend had amused us and the moment of argument

had aroused all of our emotions, strung them taut, so that we turned to these columns with senses keen, apprehensive, fully awake. And nothing better could have been devised to prepare us for the sight of this temple, standing out of ancient Greece, built by people who fought endlessly, who were constantly drawn fine and made vibrant by war or argument or competition; by a life that was never quiescent, nor comfortably dull. Things mattered to them, trivial things like five-lire pieces, greater things like temples to their gods. They drove bargains as they drove their chariots, hard and fast, with beautiful skill and daring. They could think of no finer way to celebrate their religion than by the running of a race. The mind and body were made to be used and used again; exhausted utterly, even carelessly thrown into death if by so doing something vivid, swift and beautiful could be created.

I have written something inadequate about the Temple of Diana, inadequate because a few paragraphs can hardly do what no thousands of pages have ever accomplished. Perhaps there are some few things in the world about which it is enough to say with humble brevity—"Yes, one of the most beautiful." Yet I fear I have written in another place more than these six words and I rather regret the excess, so now I leave Segesta for other matters which casual words can perhaps be expected to convey.

The nearest town to Segesta was famous, we knew, because of that great giver of names to Sicilian streets and parks and piazzas and marble statues; namely, Signor Garibaldi. It is called, this very unpretentious vil-

lage, Calatafimi. Near it, on a hill, Sicily won her glorious independence that gave her to Italy. But not only Garibaldi is enshrined in this town; there was Mr. Samuel Butler as well. Garibaldi and Butler—make of it what one is able, this very strange linking of names.

We walked to Calatafimi in the cool of late afternoon, our bags on a mule that carried also a talkative, handsome youth, to find on our arrival that the Great Hero had swallowed the little English Writer. The hotel was now the Hotel Garibaldi and the Via Butler had also succumbed to native fame. The sword had proved mightier than the pen; doubtless the result of Sicilian illiteracy. We asked the soiled, weary hotel proprietor about all this. He didn't know, but he told us that he had five children all of them a sore trial to him, that he had once been in South America, that he was unhappy, that he remembered hearing something about a foreigner of vague origin and vaguer accomplishments and he recounted a great deal more in between his tired sighs and pauses to light the stub of a cigarette.

We had looked at our room, looked away and remembered, perversely, that almost a hundred years earlier Cardinal Newman had written, "Calatafimi where we slept, I dare not mention facts." We reminded ourselves that this sinister observation seemed safely in the past. We were tired and we turned our minds away from Sicilian hotels, small inland hotels, and we summoned heroically thoughts of Segesta and of Greece. Englishmen, we said, are over fussy about some things. The Cardinal had had diffi-

culties about his precious bath. I have said we were tired, but we made various excuses about going up to bed; there was the town to see, or we could talk a little more with our host. We discussed the long day, we discussed things in particular and in general. Finally no further evasions were possible. But after all, we concluded, what if the hotel proved to be a little, shall we say primitive? Primitive! It was downright savage. No, the Hotel Garibaldi does no honor to its great name.

TRAPANI

Trapani, on the far western point of Sicily, meant for us only the nearby Monte San Giuliano, the mythical Eryx built by Æneas and for centuries the pagan shrine of the Phœnician Ashtaroth, the Greek Venus Erycinax. It was from Eryx that the wily people of Egesta borrowed the silver and gold which so impressed the Athenian envoys. To this shrine, served by the most beautiful women of the island, the Romans assigned a guard of two hundred soldiers. Later, when it was besieged by the Saracens, St. Julian appeared on the ramparts with a pack of hounds and drove the Moslems down, although just why the Christian saint should protect this spot so saturated with worship of the very pagan Aphrodite, legend does not say.

Eryx was hidden by dense clouds of *scirocco*. We stood on the station platform of Trapani and told ourselves that, for all we knew, behind the rolling grey mists lay beauty and all manner of strange mystery. But it would be left by us inviolate, for the past night had been—well, trying. Marsala, an hour away, was

vaguely "English" and now we thought only with pleasure of these Anglo-Saxons who were quite right to insist with true British doggedness on cleanliness, hot water and baths. A train left in less than an hour.

MARSALA

That for which we went on to Marsala we found—the Albergo Stella d'Italia and a new addition awaiting our pleasure, a cathedral dedicated to no other than St. Thomas of Canterbury, a fresh English sort of public garden, swept piazza, and the white, sun-cleaned, affluent town. Waiting for us when we chose to order it, was the famous golden, English Marsala, and more immediately, there was a nap, a bath and a very leisurely late afternoon stroll.

There is no town in Sicily like Marsala; it does not quite belong. How English it would be if it were not for the large Woodhouse and the Ingham-Whitaker industries, I do not know. Perhaps it is not English at all. But we thought of an old Mr. Woodhouse who came out each morning, ruddy, hearty, immaculate in white, to walk in the fashion of an English squire about his estate, keeping the town in order, storming at this laxity, correcting that bit of mismanagement, saying a word of bluff goodwill to another, patting children on the head; and an English church, St. John's, only lent reality to the old fellow we half expected to see.

Coming back from the harbor, the town of low, white, flat-roofed houses was Eastern, Tunisian, and only in the evening Sicily reclaimed it, and we were on Trincria, the island again. Yet even now it was a Sicily that kept

a foreign flavor, not Mediterranean, certainly not English. Opposite the cathedral (one called it that, not the *duomo*, thinking of its patron) were the "clubs," of which every town in Sicily has one and the largest cities many. Here in Marsala they were side by side, with their large rooms open to the sidewalk, resplendently furnished with red plush or cooler wicker chairs, where members sat and read the newspapers, talked and sent out to the nearest café for iced drinks and coffee and sweet cakes.

The piazza was filled. The night was warm. Voices were lower, more casual than in other Sicilian piazzas, and argument was a little restrained. The club members looked out at the slowly-moving crowds and demanded another ice. We drank our bottle of old Marsala and ordered fish and a cutlet and cheese and fruit. We had coffee on the sidewalk and looked in at the "Clubmen" and, with only a mild, sophisticated interest, they looked out at us. We liked Marsala. For this one evening we did not want it to be typically Sicilian; in fact, our preference was for something approximating a "nice quiet English town."

Also it was very pleasant to forget shrines and temples and ruins; history, however vivid, and legends however bizarre. Marsala may be of superlative importance as the site of the ancient something or other and the custodian of no end of precious remains, but if they exist, they were as veiled to us by our complete indifference as had been Eryx by *scirocco;* we simply didn't care. What Marsala gave us in creature comforts and quiet, pleasant ease, we accepted gladly and now

we thank her, for Selinunte was just ahead of us and unknown Sciacca and then Agrigento and famous temples again.

SELINUNTE

So we approached Selinunte with reservations. "The most unimaginable mass of ruins that exist in Europe," Mr. Crawford had written for us, adding, as I have stated before, that it was the very image of the abomination of desolation. At the moment we fancied our ruins a little more cheerful than all this sounded. Despite a considerable temperamental handicap at the start, we thought we had pulled up handily with the field in the great tourist race which has such remains, such ruins, its fixed goal, and now we were running confidently strong— Marsala had given us new energies; our heads were up.

Through a vibrant, fresh early morning we travelled along the wide coastal plain in the midst of solid vineyards that furnished the grapes for the Marsala wine. Inland, at our left, the land rose gently to the hills and seaward, sandpits ran out and were built into the salt-drying pans that continue all along the coast from Trapani. But swinging inland from Mazzara the land suddenly became sterile and uncultivated, and it was already burned a dry summer brown. The sun had driven the clouds from the sky and, swinging to the noon zenith it possessed undisputed the torrid day.

What it was that devastated the ancient Selinunte, man or earthquake, our purposeful archeological friends are hard put to say. In all truth it is a ruin. Lifted only a little from a sea of pale, limpid beauty, looking

THE CATHEDRAL AT PALERMO RECALLS THE DAYS WHEN THE CITY POSSESSED A GREAT KING AND A BRILLIANT COURT. PALERMO IS MODERN, NERVOUS, DELIGHTFUL AND THOROUGHLY SICILIAN.

THE LURID PAINTINGS THAT ADORN THE PANELS OF THE SICILIAN CARTS RUN THE GAMUT OF MYTH AND HISTORY. AT THE RIGHT IS ONE OF PALERMO'S TYPICAL AMBULATORY MERCHANTS.

out to Africa from whence at least part of its destruction came, half buried in golden sand that drifts in great dunes along the shore and about the excavations, filling the cleared path of streets and covering the vast heap of fragments, Selinunte, isolate and silent, is, I repeat, the very quintessence of destruction. Nothing was lacking—wind-blown sea sand that muffled our steps, the clinging salt grasses of the dunes, lizards by thousands, a black snake asleep in the warmth, a flower or two, the purposeless, fluttering flight of yellow butterflies, and silence. Only the brilliant day and the fiery sun were alive. We wandered, climbing half-buried steps of vast stylobates, walked the length of fallen columns, chased lizards impeded in the powdered sand, picked up fragments of terra cotta as we would have gathered tinted shells along a beach, spoke in whispers, laughed at ourselves for succumbing to the environment, whistled jazz and felt better about things, ate, drank a bottle of wine and all but slept in a bit of shade.

In 409 B.C. fifteen hundred small vessels came from Carthage with some two hundred thousand men in command of a vengeful grandson of the Hamilcar who had suffered defeat and death at Himera on this same Greek island seventy years before. He now attacked Selinunte with his ships and men and cavalry, towers and battering-rams and catapults, and his own determined will. He was not to be denied. Sixteen thousand he slew and five thousand he captured. This happened, in case it has been forgotten, some twenty-three hundred years ago. There is no doubt that Selinunte was abandoned and remains abandoned today. Out of sight

up the coast is a cluster of houses where fishermen live, but as we walked through it coming from the station, we saw almost no one. Men around a boat drawn up on the beach below looked as though they might have been driven on to this deserted coast by storm and were waiting only to leave it again for more friendly land. In both directions the low shore became a distant merge of land and sky and water, heat and silence that was two thousand years old.

SCIACCA

There is very little, I suppose, that would take *forestieri* to Sciacca, where we spent the night, yet it was a place, we said, that we wanted to come back to when we could have more time.

From a wide balcony outside of our rooms at the hotel, high above the small harbor, we watched the fishing fleet go out for the night's catch, driving by twos and in larger scattered groups, into the southwest as the sun dropped behind the headland of Capo San Marco. There was a fine, free impatience about these workers to be at their task a dozen kilometri from the shore. They seemed to leave gladly as though the harbor had irked them with its wall of stone and its lifeless, stagnant water and its earthy beach, and one easily forgot that men were aboard these graceful craft with their single lateen sails like pointed wings filled and curved by the wind, for men seemed to have as little in common with them as the dull land they evaded. Over our heads the swifts sailed and wheeled in their evening flight. Three more boats darted out of

the harbor entrance and swerved together toward a mark that only they knew; that no helmsman could have determined in the dimming plain of sea. Nor did it seem probable that they would ever return. If they touched land in that hesitant, transient fashion in which a boat deigns to recognize the shore, it would be Africa, or better, some small, uncharted island that only they could find.

Yet in the morning we went down the many steps to the shore and the boats, at least some boats, did return and the day shift went out to take their places. Into the small harbor opening these craft came, close hauled under full sail. At intervals, up the sharp slope of the boom, men clung like monkeys to the lashings and at the peak perched a youngster of twelve. Not until it had reached the middle of the congested harbor did the word go out from the master that, swinging the boat into the wind, lowered sail. As the boom came down quickly these men furled the canvas, the smallest boy at the top the last to reach deck, so that under its own way, the helmsman threaded his vessel in and nosed it against the others that already filled the space at the beach. By this time the crew had picked up the yard-wide flat baskets packed with the choice of the catch, or larger fish were caught by the gills and hurried to land. Buyers purchasing in quantity to ship away, and housewives who came down from town for half a kilo, the contending fishermen themselves and the officers of the *Dogana* all shouted in a dense group by the warehouse and conducted the usual stirring morning's business of purchase and sale.

But there was more than this in Sciacca. When we walked about the upper town, we found a library whose high walls were lined with vellum-bound histories and ecclesiastical works and medieval manuscripts, and to read here through long afternoons would, we decided, be one reason for returning. Then we climbed to one of the castles whose hundred years vendetta with its neighbor at the other side of the town became famous in fourteenth century times, and nearby we met a young priest who was restoring his church to its original Norman simplicity with an enthusiasm so contagious that we nearly missed the noon train. This church, that stood on the highland above the town had once been a monastery, and in the part of the building that had not been left to disintegrate wholly with the years, the Padre was rebuilding, largely with his own hands, a house for himself; an impossible, delightful dwelling. It was the kind of house that clambered from level to level, became a dark hovel, expanded into spaciousness, merged itself with the church it was part of, then withdrew to a truly signorial aloofness. The priest took us about, indicating this stone partition he would pull down, the entrance to a mysterious subterranean passage he had not had time, or the courage, he admitted, to explore, said where one day he would have his library, showed us a small walled garden where he would sit in the morning sun, a bedroom for a friend, a terrace that looked through gothic arches over the town and the sea, and here, he said, he would have his coffee sometimes and watch the lighthouse on Capo Marco and the stars. The Sicilian parish of Father Michele was

A Village Street

only too evidently a poor one, but his own fancy in houses and in living would have done credit to a Cardinal. He belonged to Rome and the Red, with a great villa at Frascati, a drive of clipped ilex trees and a water theater in gardens that lay against the slope of the Alban hills.

The odds are against our ever seeing Sciacca again; the world is too large. Yet all that morning this unpretentious town held us in a friendly and firm grasp and we did not want to go. It is not beautiful, it has no exceptional location, no subtle charm. It did not supply the purely sensual reaction that was a bath and a clean bed at Marsala, nor the ageless mystery that was Eryx, nor the complex stimulus of Palermo, yet we wanted to stay and, finding no reason for remaining, we had to leave. Now we would like to go back again.

Ragusa, on the contrary, on the road we took two days later from Agrigento to Modica and were again to travel by automobile, was quite different and understandable. Ragusa was the thing glimpsed only, the fascination of something half seen, a lovely voice speaking out of the dark. We know that we will never see the whole face of Ragusa, a face that may be, we think, the most beautiful in all Sicily, nor do we really want to see it. Twice it was ours to stare at and something bade us turn our eyes. We accepted it thus.

Passing this Ragusa the first time by train, we had more than a thought to stay there instead of at Modica, and yet we went on, turning to look back at the twin towns and the deep vine-hung valley between them, the cliffs with clinging grey houses and moist green

trailers and mosses and flowers, crazy steps descending and climbing again, old churches lifted above the haphazard dwellings, a full stream of rushing water below—and a tunnel!—just what these few seconds of a car window gave us of Ragusa and then sooty blackness. A month later, by motor, with ample time, with no immediate decision to be made, we came into the edge of the higher town, skirted it, dropped down a looping road until, on a turn, we could see backward to this same hanging garden and the mellow buildings; found ourselves silent in fresh amazement, felt a sudden longing and the pain of denial, yet uttered no word to the driver whose foot and hand would have immediately given back to us all that a sharp curve was taking away. Ragusa? Does it exist? Or was it already so real in our imagination that we feared this fantasy would fall to bits if we ever walked over the actual pavements or ordered dinner at the hotel?

Modica had never a fair chance. Modica we knew something about. It was said to be the place to see old customs and costumes that were the least changed, the most Sicilian in the island. There was to be a unique castello and a church at the head of a vast flight of steps. Despite a Corpus Domini procession Modica was doomed to failure. It seemed too dark and grey, a city of sixty thousand that looked like a mere village. The people followed us with their steady eyes. Certainly Modica is not spoiled by tourists, but it was dull, dull!

At this particular time we did not even have knowledge of the old June festa of the gardeners of Modica when they brought out a pasteboard figure of their saint,

a crude affair in grotesque apparel with a necklace of cucumbers, a fillet of tomatoes and a rosary of green peppers. To the music of tambourines, shouts and whistles, they took him to the gardens outside of the town and put him in a cistern while they drank and danced. Then, the saint hauled to dry land, they divided into two groups with the image between to keep them apart (a precarious position always) and battled with dirt, ripe vegetables and small stones. Again the saint was immersed and they went on with the serious business of drinking and making music. The combat was repeated when fancy moved them and so the afternoon was spent, and doubtless some pagan ritual was revived all unknown to these Sicilian *contadini.* Only at darkness the image, besmirched despite his frequent baths, and sadly torn and broken, was carried back by such of the townsmen who were able to survive the heady wine.

The hotel chambermaid gave us what she could of false hopes when we mentioned the morning's *caffé latte,* repeating the usual formula about a great deal of strong coffee and—please, not much milk! Oh, yes! She knew exactly what we wished. She had worked in Taormina and the minute preferences of *forestieri* were for her an open book. Nevertheless, we repeated with patient emphasis, "*Moltissimo caffé—forte, e—*" we shrugged to indicate that the other ingredients failed to interest us. "And jam and butter," she added brightly. We rubbed our hands. Yes, we assured her, jam and butter would be quite welcome.

At seven o'clock she bore in to us two bowls like

small soup tureens, complete with handles, filled to the top with a liquid the color of—say the palest fawn, a very badly frightened fawn a long way from its mother. We did not expect the butter, which comes in tins from distant Milan, to be other than unedible, but the surprise was the "jam," a hard cake of a depressing Sicilian product called "*mustarda*," which is made at the time of the harvest from the pressed skins of the grapes packed into forms and dried in the sun.

"You worked for *forestieri* in Taormina?" we asked.

"Sisignore."

But we had no mind for brilliant repartee conducted in a foreign language. Goat's milk is hearty and nourishing, but it is not by any feat of the imagination, strong coffee.

NOTO

We hesitated about Noto only because we had been told not to miss it. Another Modica, we said. The friend who had recommended it happened to be an artist and we decided that this was all the more reason for going on to Syracuse; it would be full of what we had learned to call derisively, "artist's bits." That it was supposed to be a surprising baroque city of spacious magnificence sounded wholly suspicious.

The pleasant way to approach this city is by road, and the ideal way would be an open carriage of fifty years ago drawn by a pair of sleek horses at a brisk trot. It was by motor, however, that we came from Agrigento across barren shore lands under potent August sun, across desolate sulphur country, the wide, shadeless *piano* of the river Salso and then over the monot-

onous miles of grey stone walls and carob trees. It had been a long day of Sicily at its least travelled and least interesting. We had been enveloped by the kind of heat that northerners go away from, the mere rumor of which causes them to say, "Surely you are not planning to stay in Sicily all summer?"

A dozen miles from Noto, however, there was change, and stone walls became plaster walls and the properties were smaller and vineyards and olive orchards took the place of grazing grounds. There was the hint of rain in the northeast and shading clouds began to gather overhead. Finally it did rain and the world became a pleasant place of drenched foliage and wet earth.

But it was not the aristocratic entrance to Noto that aristocratic Noto demands. It rained too hard for that, and it rained the evening through. Only in the morning was Noto what we had been told not to miss; all golden baroque, resplendent, poised, very old-family, just a trifle worn, just pleasantly mellow and refined. Noto is old-family still, in a quiet way living up to a former day of luxury and prime. I have said of another place that it did not seem to be Sicily. Noto is a Sicily that has been to France. It knows its Paris and its Seville and it has had its box at the opera and its presentation at Court.

In the last decades of the seventeenth century there was an earthquake that devastated all of western Sicily and Noto was in the path. It was soon rebuilt, however, by these citizens who both knew and followed the fashions of the world and who could afford them. Thus

Noto, its *palazzi*, its well-planned gardens, its raised terraces, its suavely-curving flights of steps, imposing *duomo*, *municipio*, and theater are eighteenth century and baroque—a city truly elegant, and complete. The streets are ample and regular, lined with carefully-clipped trees, and a small café in its Corso has upholstered benches against the walls as in France, and they were covered for summer with clean, tan linen—and this in the Sicilian hinterland.

It is not a busy place. Noto is not vulgarly "in trade." The booths of the open market that line one of the streets that extend from the Corso up the hill are painted red and the vegetables were piled in orderly fashion under sailcloth awnings and flies were kept off by active palmetto fans. Sicily? Its people are leisurely-moving, well dressed; books are carried about under arms, and boys read together in dense ilex shade. This is not fantasy I am writing as relief from a long sequence of the other cities and villages, typically Sicilian, which we went through in those days, nor as a respite from depressing ruins, or the night in Calatafimi. Noto is as real as any Iowa town, as a city in Sweden. It is only an hour by train or motor from Syracuse. We did not discover it, although guide books ignore it as beneath more than mention in the smallest type. (We promise ourselves a tour of some unvisited country using only these small print paragraphs, so fatiguing to eyes, as guides, knowing we will find other Notos on those rewarding, narrower byways of travel that highways rush purposefully, even scornfully by.) One of the English Sitwells has written delightfully about this

Noto, comparing it to another surprising baroque city called Lecce, that is in southern Italy, yet admitting that it has an ingratiating charm hardly to be duplicated and the sort of impossibleness that gives it an individuality not easily to be conveyed, that even rings it about with something of mystery, as if, after all, it might not be much more substantial than a gracious dream.

And this dream happens to transport one into that century, not so very long past, which has been thought of as the third and last of the undeniably Great Ages. It is pleasant to leap nimbly from Pericles and his Athens well over the second pinnacle, which is the Italian Renaissance, to eighteenth century France. Many times during the hours we spent in this small distant Noto, I thought of that France, almost unconsciously writing here and there into these paragraphs words which will surely seem out of place until they are understood in this way; until their association is explained. Boys with books (for one instance), the elegance of the buildings, the impression of sophistication, of worldliness, a luxury controlled by evident taste, orderliness that is not severity and a formality that is not rigid or repressed, but poised and always at ease—these seem to be Noto. For small Noto is civilized; the only really civilized city in Sicily, and being so completely cut away by earthquake from the past and never having reached our modern present, it remains as it was created, a thing out of what we have come to call the Age of Reason, out of the charming century of cultivated ladies and gentlemen, of baroque palaces,

of wits and philosophers, of good food and good manners and Voltaire.

How did Noto happen? Who were these Sicilians taking such delight in a rich profusion of ornament, in balconies supported by the most grotesque carvings, faces, animals, flowers, all cut into the soft yellow stone, while above, the ironwork curves out in luxurious swells and is set with hammered blossoms and twisted rails? Who demanded these cornices heavy with lush garlands and dripping with pendants and the wide window casings so deeply carved in such a delicate profusion of detail that might be found painted on the wall panels of a French salon? And who lives in these palaces with their great courtyards opening through imposing iron gates?

What we were told did not explain Noto. They said that, returning from Rome or Paris to this pleasant corner of the Sicily that is their titular home, where their properties are and their country houses, their tenants and their olives and vines, come the Marchese del Castellucco, the Principe Villadorato, Barone San Giacomo, the Marchese Rou della Ferla, and opposite the Teatro Vittorio Emanuele they pointed out to us the Palazzo San Alfano where King Ferdinand once chose to stay. Surely it would be worth some days of waiting, we decided, just to see, from a table in front of the café on the Corso, a personage called by no less a name than the Marchese Rou della Ferla (unless you prefer the Principe Villadorato) drive a smart pair of horses splendidly by.

If relatively few foreigners coming to Sicily will ever travel this southern coast and even fewer of them go to the extreme west, the mention, however brief it must be, of some of these outer towns and cities will serve to sketch in all of the island. From the hill of Enna it seems as if very nearly the entire Sicily could be seen. Northeast are the Peloritan Mountains which, with Etna itself, fill this narrowing angle of land toward Italy, north is the Madonia range over whose tops are Cefalu and Palermo, west are the lower hills that diminish to the gentle slopes that become the coast lands of Trapani and Marsala and then change to the rolling country of Agrigento, while southeast lie the classical Hyblean Hills of Syracuse and the rich *piano* of Catania; until Etna is reached again.

All of central Sicily is mountainous and treeless, often barren with flinty rock and sparse arid soil, hardly goat pasturage; or, where this austerity is softened, as around Enna, the grain lands spread a green fruitfulness in spring and a burned golden distance in summer. All of this high, central Sicily has winter months of cold, of wind unbroken and snow that often lies on the highest ranges. To be sure, there is a sun that is clear and warming at midday, but the nights become northern and all sense of southernness is lost.

It is the coast that draws its winter thousands—Taormina and Syracuse, Agrigento and the Conca d'Oro of Palermo. This is the island the world knows for its tropical palms and its oranges and lemon groves, the winter days of warmth, even heat, the almond blossoms in February and in March the fields of flowers. Pro-

tected by the mountains from the northern winds, facing the sun and the sea and desert continents, this narrow strip of intense cultivation and striking natural beauty has been appreciated and rapturously described since the earliest Greeks came, stayed and prospered. The slope of Etna is the most thickly-settled district of Europe and it is almost a single village, while between the dark houses of lava rock, the volcanic earth, so phenomenally rich and inexhaustible, is solid with vineyards that grow the grapes of the full-flavored Vino d'Etna.

Through this diverse small Sicily, as through France or Mongolia, the way to travel is by automobile. One can go slowly, one can stop; yes, stop in spite of the spirit of the motor itself that is so impatient and wants only to go on, go on, always on! Sicilian drivers, in fact all drivers, understand this imperative desire of the mechanism they serve, its deep fear of cessation, of a silent immobility and a death that reduces all its strength, all its humming aliveness to a mass of metal. A good driver the world over is a fast driver, and a good Sicilian driver delights greatly in the use of only two of the four wheels that some over-cautious manufacturer had provided. On straight roads, and there are few such miles on the island, he drives merely fast, that is, as fast as his car will go, but on the curving mountain roads he begins really to live, to smile broadly, to taste joy. He sings above the roar of the engine, he is conversational, smokes many cigarettes and keeps one hand on the horn which cries out his own arrogance and pride. He owns the road, careens over it wildly and the

THE GREAT MOSAIC ENCRUSTED CATHEDRAL OF MONREALE IS ONE OF THE MARVELS OF SICILY AND OF EUROPE.

TAORMINA IS SUPERBLY SITUATED WITH MOUNTAINS THAT LEAP BOLDLY UPWARD FROM A TROPICAL SEA AND ETNA A SNOW-HOODED PYRAMID THAT IS ALWAYS VISIBLE.

world is his. Ask him to pause so that some distant village may be seen and he is very annoyed, suggest he slow down and he is silent and hurt. But he drives well and he takes his chances with blind corners, with carts and men and goats, all in a fine abandon. Always, he is absurdly theatric, but he is seldom clumsy and blundering in the technique of his part. I should say that by nature he is hardly the ideal driver for nervous old ladies, yet, knowing him, who would say that, with such passengers behind him, he would not fall quite easily into a new, a less whirlwind rôle and conduct them mile after mile with the considerate moderation of their own coachman at home, which would endear him to them and earn a handsome reward in lire at the end?

After our ten days of travel we came to Syracuse. One of the magic names, this—Syracuse!—and the mind adds Carthage and Athens. These must surely work their spell on a traveller, young or old, unsophisticated or hardened to the enchantment of the great places of the earth. Carthage is only a strange vision compounded of Hamilcar and Hannibal, elephants, Nubian cavalry, vast fleets, preposterous gods and desert, but Syracuse and Athens mean something more exact; in fact, a thing so very intimate that it often seems as if these Greeks were our own people and that all we are today has come down to us from them alone. Athens, holding the first and the greatest civilisation of the west, of our own new west that extends from the shores of the Ægean to the island continents of the Pacific, is touched by us almost as easily in Sicilian

Syracuse as in the Greek city itself. Not alone in any sentimental fashion are these cities of five hundred years before Christ *our* cities, rather they belong to us in that very real manner that they belonged to Rome when Rome was impelled to transplant bodily the culture of the Greeks from Hellas to the Latin peninsula, or to the Renaissance who claimed it a thousand years later. The whole western world is built on the foundation of the Pagan temples and when the next new pinnacle of civilisation is reached it will be found to be not Italian nor American, but Greek.

Travelling makes true a city, yes, but also a hero, a mad man, or a poem—Syracuse, Timolean, Agathocles and Theocritus. Out of a broken Doric column that may seem to be only another broken Doric column, can come to stand still for a moment Theron or Æschylus, as out of a medieval palazzo can swagger for our delight the old Bernardo Cabrera, Count of Modica, Grand Justiciary of the Sicilian Realm. Etna is a volcano, but by its flame the goddess Ceres lit her torch that she might find the lost Persephone, and we remember that from its heights Cyclops hurled at Ulysses the mountainous clods of stone that one may see near Aci Castello, as they happened to fall a little way from the shore. Sicily has harboured so many goddesses and so many men—Venus Aryciana and Giuseppe Garibaldi, and the interval is vast that lies between.

Taormina

XIV

EVERYONE comes to Taormina to marvel, some stay to doubt and a few remain to recognize it for what it is, a place superbly situated, of an almost unsurpassed ripe beauty, mountains that leap boldly upward from a tropical sea, Etna a snow-hooded pyramid always before one's eyes, and the town itself, overrun in the season with the most typical "tourists" extant, the streets walled with the most blatant "tourist" shops in Europe, and populated by native Sicilians who are "tourist" conscious from the cradle if not from prenatal days.

It is a charming place; steep and twisting streets, flower-hung walls and shadowy *cortili,* cheerful shoemakers and brown old women spinning, goats in the early morning, fountains and Normanesque churches, medieval gateways and convent gardens. It is also a place of German pensione and Swedish pensione and English pensione, an hotel that boasts of its fantastic prices and taxis that charge treble, jazz orchestras from Rome and jewelers from Naples, and tea shops and tea shops and—

For years Taormina has spelled romance, Victorian romance, and it has been a synonym for the quaint and the "picturesque." The ecstatic sigh has gone out that Taormina is the most beautiful place in Europe,

in the world, in all Heaven as well. It *is* Heaven, they have averred breathlessly; the good ladies from Winchester, from Kansas City, from Frankfort-au-Main, when, after the usual three days or three hours in this paradise hung between sky and sea, they have returned to their own dull earth still murmuring of almonds on hillsides, of Mola clinging impossibly against the sky, Etna "so like Fujiama." Here is the antithesis of Manchester, England, and Waco, Texas, indeed of all the common things and common places of the world; husbands, and three meals a day. Here is a Hesperides of benign sun and dark provoking eyes, lush oranges and streets like stairs.

To these, Taormina is more than kind—she is all sympathy and understanding and willingness to give. What difference if they are sometimes overcharged, or take their tea in a room as English as any in Little Wannop, or if their way about is hampered by the clutter of antiques and embroideries, or if they are jostled by late enemies hurrying in an earnest flat-footed fashion to reach the nearest bottle of beer? In their eyes is the snowy wonder of Etna, and tonight they will sit in the Greek Theater and watch the sea path of the full moon. Hotel keepers shrug, "It is costly," so they excuse their high tariffs, "to provide paper for the pages on end of letters written in the throes of the first days' intoxication."

There are also the old residents of Taormina. These charming people accept her for what she is, for they know her well in sun and in grey cold, and in the candlelight that is kind to her imperfections. All of

them, as old residents must, sigh deeply at the passing of the Halcyon days, the good old days when Taormina was just an unspoiled Sicilian village, when water was carried to them from the fountains in Greek amphora and the natives were but naïve children of the south. Tourists were then—well, less the kind they now avoid when it is possible. In the eyes of these people who built their comfortable houses and made their terraced gardens, all the rest of mankind who are not, as they themselves have become, true Taorminese, the Elect, are only *forestieri;* at best a brother, and at worst very deplorable indeed. It is the feet of these *forestieri* shuffling and clattering up and down the Corso that have worn away the old, rare bloom. Of course, they are still loyal and, like true gentlemen of an older school, they may view with sorrow their Taormina grown a little common, even a bit promiscuous in her recent choice of friends, yet they hold to a code that prevents their denouncing her. After all, they say, not without self-satisfaction, nothing *can* spoil Taormina, the real Taormina, we know.

By virtue of several months' stay we also became residents. We experienced the painless metamorphosis of "tourists" to Taorminese. We had been the crude, the elbowing, the rudely staring, and finally we became the elbowed, the stared at, when we walked along the narrow Corso. We had once bought our picture postal cards and now we grew a little ill at the sight of great racks of them, and we had ordered our eleven o'clock vermouth at the Café Carlton and at last we became annoyed at paying twice the price asked in the smaller

trattorie. We learned that we were considered true residents when shopkeepers said servilely, "For you, twenty lire. You are Taorminese." We began to feel the position we had been granted only when we knowingly offered half this amount.

We came to marvel, we stayed to doubt, but we remained to feel as little annoyance in the juxtaposition of Etna and two maiden ladies from Chicago, or a piazza high above the sea, guarded by a Roman tower and a baroque church, and the overdressed youths who paraded it, as we did in those liquid eyes and blatant dishonesty, in fine old twisting, shadowed streets and offensive filth. A model village in new Germany is spotless and stupid; honesty can be hopelessly dull; and, besides, Taormina is dishonest not just because it is host to a horde of easily-deluded foreigners, but because, despite its clothes and airs of the great world, it is Sicilian at heart. After all, we cried with the rest, what price the unequalled view of Etna, the Unequalled, and these old women spinning in the sun? One is often enough done in the eye with less compensation, and the assault in Sicily is carried off with an air and a charming smile. It is some satisfaction, we decided, to recognize the suave technique of masters *par excellence* in this fine and universal art.

Taormina is always evasive. Write of its beauty and one pauses to remember a repellent clutter of hotels, and think to deride it as a place impossibly tourist and one remembers its undeniable charm. Its pretentious and smug conceit is laughable, but does the smile include that sweep of ocean and shore line and the splendid

scatter of inland mountains and Etna capped with snow?

At eleven o'clock of a mild February morning the diminutive Corso, the only level street in the restricted town, is any popular winter resort; is white flannels and smart dresses, limousines and malacca canes, leisured strolling up and down and carefully gauged bows of recognition and stares of curiosity, cameras and toy dogs. Yet a half hour's walk over a mule path into the hills will take one into isolate country of a poignant and elemental beauty, a land untouched by the modern centuries. On beyond is a wilderness of peaks and deep valleys where only a donkey can travel the paths that are the roads. Thus if disillusionment confronts one on the Corso, as well it may, it is confined by Taormina's medieval walls, and once outside the gates you are free; a few more steps and the "winter resort" is left far behind.

Perhaps Taormina was made possible for us because we happened to live out over a path that was considered as villainous as we, who were willing to travel it, were thought a shade unusual, even suspiciously strange. The house itself had a share in this decision, for it had its own history. Did not a composer once live in it and had not his wife danced through the almond trees on spring evenings? An American artist had departed hurriedly leaving a dozen canvases in lieu of his debts for wine and food. Then once there was D. H. Lawrence, no less! And was it not built twenty years ago, the older Taorminese remembered, by a good lady from Holland who had been constrained to will it to a Sicilian gentleman, a friend? Indeed, the house in the terraced almond

grove seemed to beckon, to make a sign that only queer folk saw and understood.

Past the door at night and morning the goats went to their pasturage and often we followed into the hills. We knew shepherds and had supper with *contadini* and sat with vineyard laborers in the noon sun. Then it was summer and suddenly, as if by the season's hot magic, a Taormina of the very oldest pioneering inhabitant returned, came back into its own, and it was wholly Sicilian again. The shops of antiques and laces and travel tours put up stout shutters and the resplendent hotels closed their very ornamental iron gates, and the insistent guides to Greek theater and Castello and Roman tomb slept in the increasing warmth of the piazza. Cafés came alive with cooling *gelati* and *limonati* and dust collected on such exotic impedimenta of the *forestieri* as whiskey bottles and cocktail shakers. Prices came down. The gentile proprietoresses of Tea Rooms went back to Surrey. The band, in new white uniforms, played Verdi and Bellini to a Sicilian audience who, in shirt sleeves and linen and comfortably worn canvas shoes, hummed or sang lustily the familiar scores. In the cool of early morning, fishermen came up from the shore and *contadini* rode in with their produce that ample housewives purchased with a free play of garrulous wit. Stores opened. Yet by ten o'clock the sun was high and the Corso was deserted for shuttered rooms or the beach at Mazzaro. Only at five life crept out, tentatively, from the cool siesta and again moved slowly along the Corso in the narrow strip of shape toward the nearest glass of lemon-flavored ice. From then

until midnight Taormina was busy with the easy-going, pleasantly relaxed summer activity of mingled work and talk and play. Despite certain earlier indications to the contrary, only in midsummer did we become truly *Taorminese*, accepted by the people and taken in hand familiarly by the town. And by the ordeal of summer heat, we were initiated into something the oldest winter resident never knew—the tropical quiet and gracious southern calm of the "most beautiful place in Europe." The famous lady was at last at ease, at her summer's tranquil rest, with nothing to maintain before the parade of an admiring audience nor was the din of their adjectives in her ears. She was a lovely creature, no longer young, a little tired, but charming all the same.

In a month or two they will begin to come again, these willing worshippers, and she will be ready to receive them. Breaths will be held, Etna will be Fujiama and a thousand kodaks will click.